

St. Mona's Church - Sherkin Island

A History



Dolly O' Reilly

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Printed by City Print
Victoria Cross
Carrigrohane Road
Cork
021 454 5655

Better the rudest work that tells a story or records a fact, than the richest without meaning.

John Ruskin

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Front Cover Photograph:

Sherkin Island Church, 2019.

(Photo: Dolly O' Reilly)

Thanks to all the people of Sherkin Island and to those elsewhere
who helped with and contributed to this book.

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Preface

The information in this booklet was compiled in 2018 as part of a Tús Community Work Placement Initiative. This was a part-time programme which ran for one year under the supervision of Mr. Sam Simpson of West Cork Development Partnership and was supported by Sherkin Island Development Society Ltd (SIDS. Ltd). I would like to thank Mr. Simpson and SIDS Ltd., for their help and support.

The aim of this book is to organise and present the information I have collected and to make it available through the library to anyone with an interest in the subject and to preserve the information for the future. I tried a few publishers but was not successful (unsurprisingly as the subject is so narrow). Self-publishing, in this case, was not possible so the best option was to print and bind a small number of copies and get them into the library system.

If any readers have relevant information that could be added into the existing text at any time I would be glad to hear from them: dollyoreilly1@gmail.com.

I spent much time searching for, and put advertisements in two local papers (*Evening Echo* and *Southern Star*) appealing for a photograph of the interior of the church before it was renovated in the late 1940s. I was unsuccessful but would still be very interested in finding that photo if anyone can help? There is, of course, the possibility that such a photograph does not exist.

I contacted the Redemptorist Mission in Limerick looking for information or references to their Mission on Sherkin in 1892 (see brass plaque commemorating same mounted on the back wall of the church). Initially they said the archives were closed and in the process of being relocated. Much later I contacted them again and eventually got in touch with somebody who promised to look through their records but unfortunately they didn't find anything of relevance. I was not in a position to travel to the archives and spend the required time searching so perhaps a record of that Mission to Sherkin in 1892 is hidden somewhere amongst their files waiting to be discovered?

Despite setbacks, I believe it is never too late to collect and compile information. If a comparable study to this had been done in say, the 1920s, it would be invaluable now. I hope that this information will be of interest to some people now and importantly, may be useful to somebody in years to come, as a record of what St. Mona's church was like in the early 21st century. If any more information or photographs turn up in the meantime they can be added to the text.

Any errors that occur in this book are my own.

Dolly O' Reilly
Sherkin Island
2021.

Introduction

Parish of Rath and the Islands

At the national synod of Thurles (1850) it was resolved that the diocese of Cloyne and Ross should be divided and the see of Ross be restored. Once papal approval was given for this decision, William Keane was appointed bishop of Ross, and consecrated on 2 February 1851. He was bishop of this diocese until 1857 after which he was translated to Cloyne where he remained until his death in 1874.¹ The separation of Cloyne and Ross meant a drop in financial remuneration, a fact that was borne upon Bishop Keane shortly after his appointment to Ross. He realized that there was a great gap between what he expected and what he received as 'necessary episcopal revenue.'² He wrote to Pope Pious IX (1846-1878), outlining his concerns and pointed out that '... prior to the division of Cloyne and Ross curates and their assistants were in receipt of an annual maintenance grant for their ministry in Cape Clear and Sherkin Islands. . .'³ Bishop Keane suggested a possible way to improve his financial difficulties, namely, to allocate himself a second mensal⁴ parish and erect an eleventh parish to be known as Rath and the Islands.⁵

At that time Sherkin and Cape were under the jurisdiction of the Bishop but were administered by priests residing on one or other island. Bishop Keane decided to separate Rath from Skibbereen and enlarge it (Rath) by the addition of the islands.⁶ In this way the combined revenues of Rath and the Islands would be enough to support a parish priest and a curate. Rome gave the necessary permission and in 1851 the newly-constituted parish of Rath and the Islands was established, with Fr. Henry Leader as its first parish priest.⁷

¹ Owen McGee, *William Keane* in Dictionary of Irish Biography, <http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do;jsessionid=9E84003E5D14EF27055E7EADF69D283B?articleId=a4406#> [Accessed: 2018/05/17].

² Evelyn Bolster, *A History of the Diocese of Cork, The Episcopate of William Delaney 1847-1886*, (Tower Books of Cork, 1993). PP. 62, 63.

³ Ibid. P. 62.

⁴ 'Mensal': having to do with providing food, lodging, etc. for the clergy. <http://www.yourdictionary.com/mensal> [Accessed: 2018/05/17].

⁵ Evelyn Bolster, *A History of the Diocese of Cork, The Episcopate of William Delaney 1847-1886*, (Tower Books of Cork, 1993). P. 63.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid.

St. Mona's Church

The earliest known reference to churches and Christianity on Sherkin must be attributed to St. Mona who, according to tradition, is patron saint of the island. This figure has proved extremely difficult to pin-point in history as references to the name Mona (Mughain) give at least two different possible saints and there are several places in Ireland called Kilmoon (the anglicized *Cill Mughain*, St. Mona's church).

In *A Dictionary of Irish Saints* (2012) Ó Riain, referring to Mughain, says 'She may [. . .] be the patron of Kilmoon on Sherkin Island in the Cork Parish of Tullagh, whom the genealogists attached to the same branch of the Corca Laoighdhe (Corkalee) as Liadhain, mother of Ciarán of Seirkeiran and Cape Clear Island.'⁸

An examination of that branch of the genealogy shows that Mughain preceded Liadhain by at least five generations which would make her approximately 125 years older than St. Ciaran, if one takes a generation to mean 25 years.⁹ This gives rise to the question of how Mughain (Mona), so many years earlier, was Christianised, as St. Ciaran is, according to tradition, the first person to preach Christianity in Ireland. He was born on Cape Clear in 352 A. D. according to the *Annals of Innisfallen*.

However, modern scholars say that, other than feast-days, dates concerning saints are of little or no consequence, and a good deal of what the record has to say about St. Ciaran and his pre-Patrician status has been dismissed as propaganda. Similarly, dates such as the 352 A.D. attached to Ciaran can be discounted simply because there are no relevant documents from that period.¹⁰ Basically, all we know about Mona or Mughain is that she was venerated on Sherkin Island and that she is likely to have been part of a cult that spread to other areas,¹¹ for example, Mughain of Lyons barony, Co. Kildare.¹²

The extract below from *The Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*¹³ mentions the townland of Kilmoon (*Cill Mona*, St. Mona's Church). It says that this place is mentioned in a Papal Document dated 1199. This is the earliest references to this townland that I have found:

Kill-woony. This is an interesting word. It is the *Cill Mughaine* (Church of St. Mughain) mentioned in the Genealogy of Corca Laidhe, and it is the parish called Cell-mugana mentioned in a Papal document of 1199. It is now called Kilmoon (in Sherkin Island), where there is a holy well called *Tobar na 3ab4* (the Smiths' well). St. Mughain was a virgin saint.

The Papal Document of 1199 says the parish of Kilmoon is located between (Glenbarrahane) Castlehaven and Aughadowan which might be equated with the townland of Kilmoon on

⁸ Pádraig Ó Riain, *A Dictionary of Irish Saints*, (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2012). P. 502

⁹ John O' Donovan (ed.), *Miscellany of the Celtic Society* (Goodwin and Nethercott, Dublin, 1849). Pp. 19, 20.

¹⁰ Pádraig Ó Riain, University College, Cork. Pers. Comm. (27/05/2018).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Pádraig Ó Riain, *A Dictionary of Irish Saints*, (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2012). P. 502

¹³ J. M. Burke, Carbery Topographical Notes in *Journal of Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, Volume X, Second Series, Guy & Co. Ltd, Cork (1904). P. 205.

Sherkin.¹⁴ Ultimately, all that can be said at the present time is that St. Mona is patron saint of Sherkin Island, the townland of Kilmona indicates that a church named in her honour existed in that townland (as the present church does) and some of the local oral traditions are attached to her.

Interestingly, two farmers who were digging on a farmstead (now a ruin) in this townland in the 1940s, unearthed an area that revealed foundations or a flagged area which gave rise to local belief that it was the site of St. Mona's cell. The same site is also reputed to be the location of a graveyard or maybe a Killeen (*Cillín*; a little church; a small cell; a churchyard set apart for infants).¹⁵ One of the people who was born in this house remembers when, as children, he and his sister used to find, what he called 'monastic items', meaning crosses of iron in a mound outside their door. They were warned by their elders not to interfere with that particular mound as it was believed to be sacred.¹⁶ On another occasion an adult human skull¹⁷ was turned up by farmers cultivating a field on this farm.¹⁸ As a result, the work was stopped, but the belief that it was a burial ground was confirmed in the minds of the local people. The following extract from the *Schools Manuscripts Collection* (1936-1938), illustrates these beliefs:

St. Mona is the patron saint of Sherkin. She was born in North Kilmona which was named after her. South Kilmona is also named after her. There was a church in North Kilmona which she established. A well is also named after her though it is a long way away from her townland. There is an old burial ground in North Kilmona.¹⁹

There are other references connected to this site, two of which I will describe here. The first involved two people I knew personally and I spoke to the man involved who re-told it to me recently.²⁰

About 25 years ago, this man (originally from England, now living on Sherkin) was going out with a girl who was not local and had no knowledge of this island but was working on Sherkin for the summer. He himself had no foreknowledge of this area but liked the site and was showing it to the girl. One evening they were looking around the ruined farm. At a specific point, they turned towards the house and the girl got a bad feeling and said she didn't like the place because there was a graveyard there. I just spoke to this man to get the details of that story and he confirmed it. He said he still gets the chills thinking about it. Neither of them was from Sherkin or had ever heard anything about this particular site.

In an unrelated incident a group of four islanders was walking home one night and looked across from where the Community Hall is now built, towards this general area. They saw a

¹⁴ Bruno O' Donoghue, *Parish Histories and Placenames of West Cork*, (The Kerryman Ltd., Tralee, 1983). P. 34

¹⁵ <https://celt.ucc.ie//Dinneen1sted.pdf>. P. 133 [Accessed: 2018/07/10].

¹⁶ Marie O' Driscoll-Deese whose father, aged 92 in 2020, grew up in the house on this site which is now a ruin. Pers. Comm. (20/06/2018).

¹⁷ I spoke to Dr. Barra O Donnabhain, Archaeology Department, University College Cork, about this. He said that children's skulls are rarely uncovered intact so the skull was most likely that of an adult. If the area was a children's burial ground, which is not confirmed, why was an adult interred here? Perhaps it was an isolated burial but unless the area is examined properly, it is not possible to answer these questions.

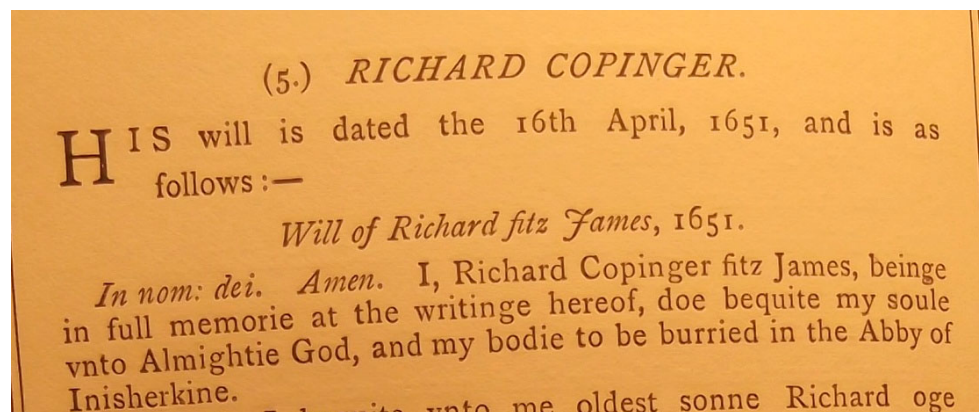
¹⁸ John Norris, Sherkin Island. Co. Cork. Pers. Comm. (23/05/2018).

¹⁹ <https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/4798750/4795613?pageNum=212>. PP. 212-213. [Accessed: 2018/07/02].

²⁰ Jez Wickens, Sherkin Island. Pers. Comm. (07/07/2018).

number of lights that appeared to be floating along the rim of the cliffs in the tidal area opposite. The lights were moving back and forth and there were two bright lights in the centre. Two of them wanted to investigate further, but were persuaded not to go there by the others. Next day they discussed it with a local man (who was born in 1915) and he was not surprised and explained it by saying that that is where the *Cillín* (children's graveyard) is, implying that that was why the lights were hovering in that area.²¹ This is relevant because the older man who was born in 1915 immediately referred to the graveyard for un-baptised children, lending further support to the belief that a graveyard is located on this site. I know the people involved in both of these incidents and I am quite certain that the stories are true. It is very interesting that in both instances, a graveyard was mentioned, firstly by the girl who was completely unfamiliar with the place and secondly by a local man who took it for granted that a graveyard is located there. This information would have come down to him from previous generations.

Could it be that this was the site of the local graveyard before it moved to the friary hundreds of years ago?



This extract shows that burials were taking place in Sherkin friary in 1651.²² At that point the place had been taken over by Cromwellian soldiers one of whom was Becher. The Becher family were landlords of this area and it was Sir Henry Becher who handed the ruins of the friary over to the Board of Works in 1892 to be cared for as a National Monument. Sherkin has been inhabited for thousands of years but there is no remembered history of any burial ground on the island other than the current one within the friary walls. Where was the local burial ground before this? Could it have been on the site described above. The only way to find out for certain would be if an archaeological examination of the place could be carried out.

²¹ Breda Collins, Sherkin Island. Pers Comm. (07/07/2018).

²² Source: *History of the Coppingers or Copingers of the County of Cork Ireland and the Counties of Suffolk*, (Manchester, H. Sothorn, 1884), P. 66.

The Franciscan Friary

If St. Mona was the earliest figure to establish a Christian Church on Sherkin Island, the next documented church belonged to the Franciscan Friary. Franciscans lived by the Rule of St. Francis which meant lives of obedience, poverty and chastity. Unlike some of the other orders, the Franciscans had a pastoral vocation. They would have provided spiritual guidance for the islanders by celebrating Mass and hearing confessions. The western part of the nave was where the people would have gathered to hear the brothers preach, another important aspect of their calling.²³ Pococke in his tour of Ireland in 1758, referring to Sherkin Friary wrote: 'The church is a good building with a tower raised on an arch and there are large pillars in the south side.'²⁴

Number of friars on Sherkin

Brother Colmán Ó Clabaigh, OSB, of Glenstal Abbey, who has written extensively on the subject of religious foundations, says: 'Whilst it is very difficult to say how many friars lived in these places, it is certainly fewer than we imagine. Very large houses like Dublin or Drogheda had communities in the high twenties at the middle of the fourteenth century but these were exceptional.' He believes that there may have been between 8-15 monks in occupation when Sherkin friary was functioning fully. He came to this conclusion after an examination of the dormitories when he visited this island about 10 years ago.²⁵

Friars also maintained short-term accommodation for benefactors and other guests. The west ranges of many of the fifteenth-century foundations, including Sherkin Island, provided accommodation of a higher standard than that found in the friars' dormitory in the east range so that these areas were probably reserved for guests and visitors. This is indicated by the presence of garderobes, fireplaces and dormitory style windows as seen in the west range of Sherkin friary and in the Franciscan house in Adare, Co. Limerick.²⁶

Clothes

The Franciscan Mendicants wore a long grey woollen tunic the colour of ashes and tailored in the form of a cross. A cord tied around the waist, extended down the front and often this cord had knots symbolizing the friar's vow of poverty, chastity and obedience.²⁷ Franciscans were forbidden to wear secular clothes, they normally slept in their habits or part of them and undergarments were usually made of woollen cloth as an expression of poverty and asceticism.²⁸

The bolts of cloth from which the habits were made were often gifted to the friars and in some cases, were made by 'high born' ladies who vied with each other to be the first in the year to prepare the webs of cloth for the habits of the friars.²⁹

²³ Colmán Ó Clabaigh, OSB, Glenstal Abbey, Co. Limerick. Pers. Comm. (30/05/ 2018).

²⁴ Richard Pococke's Irish Tours (ed. John McVeigh), (Irish Academic Press, 1995). P. 154.

²⁵ Colmán Ó Clabaigh, OSB, Glenstal Abbey, Co. Limerick. Pers. Comm. (30/05/2018).

²⁶ Colmán Ó Clabaigh, OSB, *The Friars in Ireland 1224-1540* (Four Courts Press, 2012). Pp. 113, 232.

²⁷ Ibid. P. 119

²⁸ Ibid. P. 118

²⁹ Ibid. P. 123

Food

Studies indicate that in proportion to the general population, a disproportionate number of monks suffered from a disorder called Diffuse Idiopathic Skeletal Hyperostosis (DISH).³⁰ This causes ligaments to become hard or calcify and is an indication of too much food and not enough exercise. These studies have been carried out mostly in England but there is a slight parallel with findings in Ireland. In Ennis Friary, Co. Clare, the skeleton of one elderly male showed signs of this skeletal disorder.³¹

Excavations carried out in Sherkin Friary in 1996 found butchered animal bones, fish and shellfish remains. These however, may date from transient occupation during the post-reformation period.³² However, the monks on Sherkin would almost certainly have eaten fish as the main part of their diet, as was the case in many other orders. Many houses were located near rivers or sea inlets and owned weirs and fishing rights.³³

Sherkin friary also had land attached to the monastery where they could have grown their own vegetables, fruit and perhaps cereals. There is very little existing evidence for the use of poultry in either the archaeological record or written records. There is none that I am aware of for Sherkin. This however, does not mean that the friars did not have poultry and a supply of eggs for domestic use providing a cheap and easy source of protein.

All religious houses were restricted in their consumption of quadrupeds (flesh of four-legged animals). For example unless they were ill the Dominicans and Carmelites abstained from eating meat, although these laws were relaxed in the 14th century and in actual fact, some communities abstinence from meat may have been more aspirational than real.³⁴

Foundation of Sherkin Friary.

In 1440 a papal mandate was given to the Bishop and Dean of Ross and to Daniel O' Glavin, a canon of Ross. This was in response to a petition made by Finghin O' Driscoll of the Ross Diocese to the Holy See, to found a monastery for Friars Minor in his territory.³⁵ Another source states that:

In 1449 Nicholas V³⁶, at the request of Fineen O' Driscoll, mandated Jordan Purcell, bishop of Cork, his dean, and a canon of Ross to license and to found a friary in his territory in honour of God, St. John the Baptist and St. Francis. This is probably a reference to the friary at Sherkin Island, though it is possible that this was not put into effect for some time as the next reference to the friary occurs in 1460-2 and the founder is given as Florence O' Driscoll.³⁷

³⁰ Ibid. P. 125

³¹ Ibid.

³² Jerry O' Sullivan (with contribution by John Tierney), 'Sherkin Island Co. Cork: Excavation of the North Range' in *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, (1999-2001), Pp. 37-49.

³³ Colmán Ó Clabaigh, OSB, *The Friars in Ireland 1224-1540* (Four Courts Press, 2012). P.130

³⁴ Ibid. P. 127

³⁵ John T. Collins, *An Island Friary* in Jerome O' Callaghan (ed), *Franciscan Cork, Souvenir of St. Francis Church, Cork* (Killiney, Four Masters Press, 1953). P. 48.

³⁶ Pope Nicholas V: Pope from 6 March 1447 to 24 March 1455.

³⁷ Colmán Ó Clabaigh, *The Franciscans in Ireland, 1400-1534, From Reform to Reformation*, (Four Courts Press, 2002). Pp.52, 53.

The *Annals of the Four Masters* give the date as 1460: 'A monastery was founded for Franciscan Friars in Inis-Arcain, in Munster, in the diocese of Cork. Inis-Arcain is in O'Driscoll's country.'³⁸ From these sources it seems that the friary was functioning by the very early 1460s and continued to do so until the attack of 1537.³⁹

In his book '*Sketches in Carbery*', published originally in 1872, author Dr. Daniel O' Donovan, says a corner-stone near the east end of the building commemorates, by inscription, the original date of erection— 1460,⁴⁰ which verifies the date given in the *Annals* and other sources.

Suppression of Monasteries

During the time period 1536-1539 the suppression or destruction of monasteries in Ireland and England was taking place under King Henry VIII. Henry had broken off from the Roman Church and declared himself Supreme Head of the Church of England after Pope Clement VII had refused to annul his marriage to Henry's first wife, Catherine of Aragon. Henry needed the annulment in order to marry Anne Boleyn. When the Pope refused his request, Henry took matters into his own hands, split with Rome, established the Church of England with himself as head and married Anne Boleyn in 1533.

Between 1536 and 1540, in England and Wales, Henry took over 800 monasteries, abbeys, nunneries and friaries, some of which had grown very wealthy and accumulated large amounts of land and other material possessions⁴¹ (through bequests, in some cases, as the rich were keen to secure their places in heaven through donations to these establishments).

Henry's break with Rome had a more gradual impact on Ireland but his supremacy over the Church was accepted in 1536 by the Irish Parliament who passed a bill for the suppression of monasteries in 1537. Those establishments within 'The Pale', (the Dublin area) were dissolved but some of those outside The Pale, (in Gaelic areas) continued to function until they were closed under Elizabeth I. Some in the northwest remained until the reign of James I of England and VI of Scotland.⁴² There is, however, no record of Sherkin Friary having been visited during these suppressions, perhaps because it had already been badly damaged and looted by that time.⁴³ Following the 1537 attack on Sherkin Island, it seems that the friary did still function in some capacity because records show that in 1577 a Cork merchant, Alderman Meade gave four barrels of salt and a hundred measures of corn to the

³⁸ *Annals of the Four Masters* in C.E.L.T., Ref: M1460.14. P.1009.

<https://celt.ucc.ie//published/T100005D/index.html> [Accessed: 2018/05/15].

³⁹ In reprisal for an act of piracy which had been committed against them, authorities from the town of Waterford attacked the island which they 'overran with fire and sword for five days', burned the castle (Dún na Lóng, seat of the O' Driscoll chieftains on Sherkin), and stole the bell, chalice and other valuables from the friary which they reduced to ruins. . . ' For further reading on this see, Dolly O' Reilly, *Sherkin Island A Local History*, (Sliabh Mór Press, 2013). Pp. 29-35.

⁴⁰ Daniel O' Donovan, *SKETCHES IN CARBERY CO CORK ITS ANTIQUITIES, HISTORY, LEGENDS AND TOPOGRAPHY*. (Dublin, McGlashin and Gill, 50 Upper Sackville Street, 1876). Pp.36,37

⁴¹ <http://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item106122.html> [Accessed: 2018/05/14].

⁴² <http://www.buildinghistory.org/church/reformation.shtml> [Accessed: 2018/05/14].

⁴³ In March, 1537 an army from Waterford attacked Sherkin Island in reprisal for an act of piracy that the O' Driscoll chieftain had committed against a ship bound for Waterford with a cargo of wine. They overran the island with fire and sword and sacked the O' Driscoll castle and the Friary. For further reading on this see, Dolly O' Reilly, *Sherkin Island A Local History*, (Sliabh Mór Press, 2013). Pp. 29-35.

friars of Inisherkin.⁴⁴ Five years later, a lease was granted to James Hayden, gent of the house of the begging friars of Baltimore, called the monastery of Inisherkin. In the late 1580s and early 1590s leases were granted to Thomas Wye and John Bealing. In 1609, a grant of the site was given to a William Brouncker; it is described as 'the late house of the mendicant friars of Baltimore, called the Monastery of Inisherkin. . .' The building consisted of a croft, a cemetery and other ruinous buildings, with two gardens and a close containing six acres.⁴⁵ Collins says 'it would seem that the friars returned and in 1627, Fr. Francis Matthews repaired the monastery buildings.'⁴⁶ The friary was confiscated by Cromwellian soldiers, Captains Jervois and Becher, in 1650.⁴⁷ Despite Cromwellian persecution, friars were active all during the seventeenth and well into the eighteenth centuries. The last friar, Fr. Patrick Hayes, died soon after 1766.⁴⁸ In subsequent years, a part of the friary was used as a curing house for pilchards. Randall Westropp and another man, Robert Travers worked the curing house until 1769.⁴⁹

There does not seem to have been any activity in the friary in the nineteenth century apart from its function as the local graveyard and the occasional pilfering of building stones from the site as illustrated by this court report:

At the Skibbereen Petty Sessions on Thursday James Young and Robert Evans were fined £5 each and ordered to pay £5 compensation for removing stones from the old graveyard on Sherkin Island. The defendants were found dismantling the ruins of the Abbey, which contains some beautiful arches and windows, and it was stated that the stones taken from the building were broken up and used to make fences and mend outhouses. The magistrates expressed a strong feeling of indignation at these acts of vandalism and a determination to protect the venerable ruin from further desecration.

Cork Examiner, August 19th, 1876. P. 2.

The building was handed over to the Board of Works by Sir Henry Beecher in 1892 and has been under their care as a National Monument since then.

When the friars were no longer able to provide pastoral care for the islanders, Mass would probably have been celebrated at the Mass Rock and may also have been celebrated in

⁴⁴ John T. Collins, 'An Island Friary' in Jerome O Callaghan (ed.), *Franciscan Cork Souvenir of St. Francis Church Cork*, (Killiney, Four Masters Press, 1953), P. 49.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ <https://www.franciscans.ie/friaries/sherkin-island-co-cork/> [Accessed: 2018/10/29].

⁴⁹ Arthur J. Went, 'The Irish Pilchard Fishery' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, Vol.51 (1945-8), Pp. 102-3.

private houses as was the general case in catholic communities in the immediate post-Reformation period.⁵⁰

At this point in Irish history, the suppression of the catholic majority was well underway. The Penal Laws were systematically enforced between 1695 and 1829 when the *Roman Catholic Relief Act* was passed.

The more major of the Penal Laws included:

- Exclusion of Catholics from holding public office such as Judge, Member of Parliament, solicitor, jurist or barrister, civil servant, sheriff, or town councillor.
- No Catholic could vote or be elected to office.
- A ban was imposed upon Catholics from owning land.
- Catholics could not lease land for longer than thirty one years and the rent was to equal two thirds of the yearly value of the land.
- Catholics were not allowed to hold arms nor be members of the armed forces nor own a horse worth more than £5.
- If a Catholic landholder died, his estate could not be passed to the eldest son unless that son was a Protestant. Otherwise it was to be shared by all the surviving sons.
- A ban was imposed upon intermarriage between Catholics and Protestants.
- Catholic could not be an orphan's guardian.
- Catholics were barred from living in many provincial towns.
- Catholic clergy were to be registered and required to take an oath of loyalty, but friars, monks, hierarchy and Jesuits were to be exiled.
- No cleric could wear distinguishing clothes.
- Places of worship could not have a steeple or display a cross.
- Catholics and dissenters were required to pay tithes to the Anglican Church of Ireland which was the Established Church.
- Catholics could not establish schools or send their children abroad for education.⁵¹

Edmund Burke, the Anglo-Irish statesman born in Dublin, described the penal laws thus:

It was a machine of wise and elaborate contrivance, and as well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment, and degradation of a people, and the debasement, in them, of human nature itself, as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man.

The laws would have a serious impact on Irish society and drive the country into deeper poverty for years to come. However, the catholic religion continued to flourish as people found ways to practice their faith hidden from the eyes of the authorities. Mass Houses and Mass Rocks were used throughout Ireland during this period. Natural flat slabs of rock served as altars or in some cases, flat slabs of rock were erected and used as altars. These

⁵⁰ Eamonn Cotter, 'Architectural change and the parish church in post-reformation Cork' in *The Parish in Medieval and Early Modern Ireland Community Territory and Building* (eds.), Elizabeth Fitzpatrick and Raymond Gillespie, (Four Courts Press, Dublin. 2006). P. 276.

⁵¹ <https://www.yourirish.com/history/17th-century/introduction-of-anti-catholic-penal-laws> [Accessed: 2018/06/19].

rocks were sometimes inscribed with a cross and later had commemorative plaques erected.⁵² There are many examples of such sites in Ireland today.

Sherkin Mass Rock

The Mass Rock on Sherkin, in the townland of Farranacoush, lies in a secluded spot overlooking Kinish harbour to the west and surrounded by higher land to the east, north and south. The site is obscure as these places had to be in case of discovery by the authorities. Lookouts were probably posted in the high surrounding ground when it was used in Penal times.



E/W: The mass rock (flat slab, centre-left) in an area hidden by elevated ground to south, north and east and by Kinish Harbour to the west. (Photo: Dolly O' Reilly, 2008).

There is no marker on this site today to indicate its former use. Mass Rocks did not always appear on the Ordnance Survey maps. More often than not, they were not marked. Some of the map-makers involved in the original surveys were not of the Catholic faith and regarded such sites as superstitious nonsense and ignored them. They have also been ignored to a degree by Irish historians.⁵³ There no documentary record that I know of that shows Sherkin Mass Rock being used as a religious site except for the fact that it has been referred to locally as the Mass Rock for generations. A local source remembers his father saying that he used to take a short-cut to school past the Mass Rock.⁵⁴ This would have been about 100 years ago. A woman living in the same area claimed to have heard bells ringing in the site of the rock.⁵⁵ Whatever about the veracity of the second story, it shows

⁵² Tony Nugent, *Were You At The Rock? A History of Mass Rocks in Ireland*, (The Liffey Press Ltd. Dublin, 2013). P. 5

⁵³ Tony Nugent, Pers. Comm. (29/06/2018).

⁵⁴ John Norris, Sherkin Island. Pers. Comm. (29/06/2018).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

that the site has been held as sacred through the years. In 2000, a commemorative mass was held at the Mass Rock on Sherkin. This event was attended by many people both from the island and the mainland.



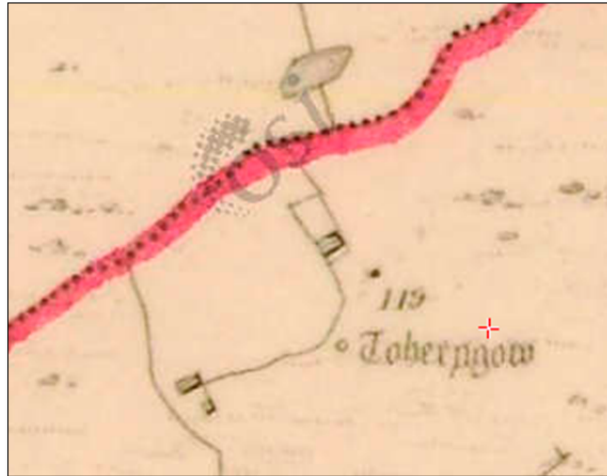
E/W: Summer 2000. Millennium Mass being celebrated at the site of the mass rock. Kinish harbour in background. (Photo: Courtesy of Robbie Murphy, Sherkin Island, 2000).



N/S: View of the mass rock from the north. Note large rock outcrop on left. The actual mass rock may be part of this outcrop which became disengaged. Celebrants: Fr Denis Collin, Canon Denis Keane and Fr. Jim Donovan. Altar girls: Susannah and Rebecca Norris, Sherkin Island. (Photo: Courtesy of Robbie Murphy, Sherkin Island, 2000).

Sherkin Island's Holy Wells

There is a forgotten well on Sherkin in a relatively remote position on the very overgrown hillside called, in the earliest detailed map, (1842), *Toberagow*.⁵⁶ As far as I can make out, this is an Anglicization of the Irish *Tobar na Gabha* (Well of the Smith). The same well appears on the upgraded twenty-five inch map of Sherkin which was made in 1899.⁵⁷



Toberagow as shown on the original six-inch Ordnance Survey map of Sherkin (made in 1842). The tiny circle beside the letter 'T' in *Toberagow*, indicates the well.



The same well as shown on the twenty-five inch Ordnance Survey map made in 1899. The circle indicating the well is clearer in this image and positioned beside the letter 'W' in the name '*Toberagow*'

The reference below, which dates from 1849 says this well is called *Tobernagabha*, otherwise *Tobar Mughaine* (St. Mona's Well). So in this instance, both names are applied to the same well.

⁵⁶ © Ordnance Survey Ireland/Government of Ireland Copyright Permit No. MP 003420



The name is spelled in different ways: On the 1842 map it is anglicised to *Toberagow* (phonetic spelling), from the Irish, *Tobar na nGabha* (Well of the Smith) which is sometimes spelled *Tobar na Gabha*, or hyphenated as *Tobar-Gabha*.

⁵⁷ © Ordnance Survey Ireland/Government of Ireland Copyright Permit No. MP 003420



Mughain of Cill-Mughaine, now Kilmoone in the barony of Kinelmeaky. The pedigree of this virgin is not given by the O'Clerys. [Erratum p. 418:] 'Cill-Mughaine, i.e. the Church of St. Mugania, is not Kilmodan, but Kilmoon, a townland on Sherkin Island in the parish of Tullagh, County of Cork. It bounds Kinish harbour, and contains a holy well called Tobar Mughaine otherwise Tobar-Gabha. See Ord. Map of the County of Cork, Sheets 149 and 153.'⁵⁸

There is another well (no longer in use) located some distance east of *Toberagow*, sometimes referred to as St. Mona's Well. (See map below).⁵⁹



Follow the red line from *Toberagow* (left), to the approximate location of the later holy well sometimes called St. Mona's Well, above the entrance to Horseshoe Harbour.

That Holy Well located east of *Toberagow* is not marked on the original Ordnance Survey map of Sherkin (1842) or on the later upgraded edition (1899). However, it was certainly a ritual site in the past. An excerpt from the *Schools Manuscripts Collection* (1936-38) refers to it as follows:

The Holy Well is situated on the hillside overlooking Horseshoe Bay. It is a small well surrounded by small fuchsia bushes. There is an old legend connected with it that people get cured there and on that account it is visited at certain times such as May Eve and St John's Night. If a little bird is heard chirping when a person suffering from any disease is praying there it is considered a very good sign of being cured. It is the custom of the people to take something with them when they visit it, such as a part

⁵⁸ From *The genealogy of Corca Laidhe* (Author: Unknown), p.19 column 2 (section 6).
<https://celt.ucc.ie//published/T105009/note051.html> [Accessed: 2018/07/09].

⁵⁹ Based on Ordnance Survey six-inch map of Sherkin Island. 1842.

of a rosary beads, a medal, a bunch of flowers, or a bit of rag. People usually cross the hills when they visit the Holy Well. It is said the Well takes its Irish name (*Tobar na nGabha*) from an old smith in the old times.⁶⁰

The fact that the writer of this piece says that the well is *overlooking* Horseshoe harbour helps identify which well is being referred to. The well which is marked on the maps as *Toberagow* has no view of Horseshoe harbour, whilst the well referred to above as St. Mona's Well, overlooks the harbour to the east and north (below). The primroses are also shown in the photographs below.



Looking north from the site of the holy well referred to in the *Schools Manuscripts Collection* and used as a site of worship within living memory. (Photo: Dolly O Reilly).

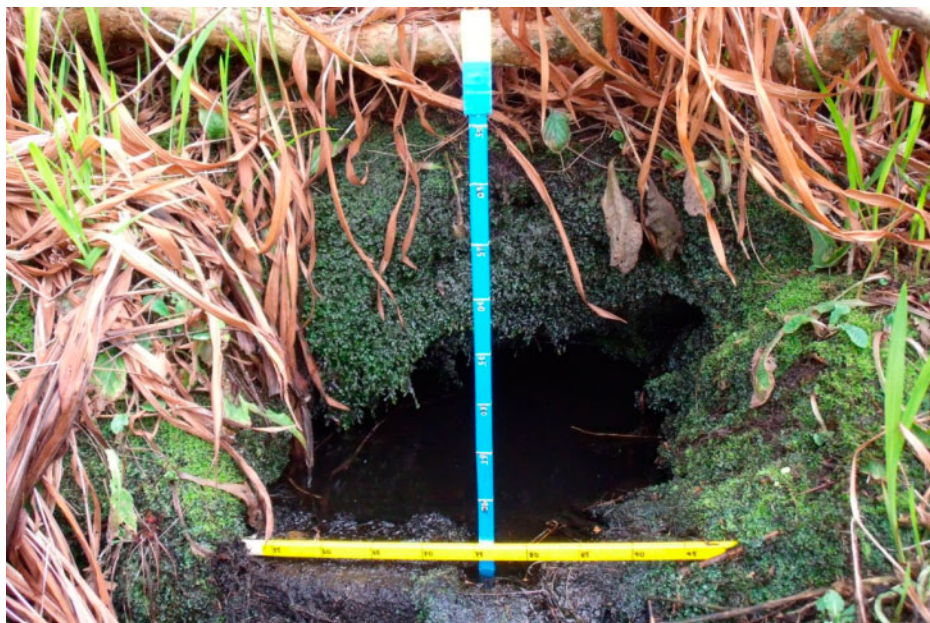


The well cleared in preparation for the Millennium Mass of 2000. Primroses at the well are referred to in the *Schools Manuscripts Collection*. (Photo: courtesy of Robbie Murphy, Sherkin Island, 2000).

⁶⁰ <https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/4798750/4795639> [Accessed: 2018/07/09]. P.194.



NW/SE: Millennium Mass being celebrated at the Holy Well. Summer, 2000. To the east is the harbour's mouth and Baltimore in the background. (Photo: courtesy of Robbie Murphy, Sherkin Island, 2000).



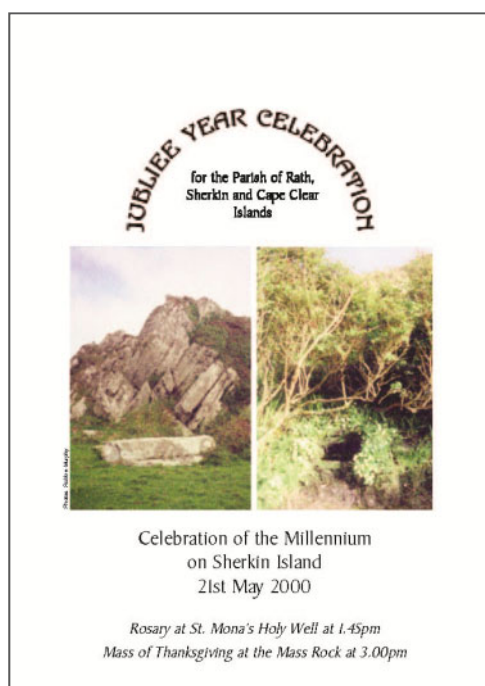
The Holy Well in 2009 (Photo: Dolly O Reilly)

The old documentary sources sometimes attribute the name St. Mona's Well to *Tober na Gabha*. If *Tober na Gabha* is in fact, St. Mona's Well (and sometimes called both names), how did the well shown above also come to be known as St. Mona's Well? It is feasible that *Toberagow* was transferred to this place as it may have been easier to access or did both wells function as ritual sites at the same time although only one of them is recorded on the early O.S. maps? As we've seen above with Mass rocks, not all sites of worship were recorded on these maps. In conclusion the most I can say is that two wells existed, both of which appear to have been sites of worship in the past. There is no existing memory of the well called *Tober na Gabha* actually being used as a place of veneration but it was certainly a

Holy Well according to old documentary sources and oral tradition. This is also borne out by the style of script used to mark the site name on the 1842 map. This is the script used to indicate sacred sites or sites of archaeological/antiquarian interest.⁶¹ The well nearer Horseshoe Harbour has been the focus of worship within living memory. Indeed, I remember being there as a child and seeing coins in that well. A reference from the early 1970s describes it as follows:

In the next valley to Miss Donovan's house there is a holy well where people suffering from illness used to go to be cured. She could remember the time when the house was filled on May Eve, and her mother would have baked a great heap of cakes for the guests. Her own sister, who had been going to the doctor without success, was cured at the well of a bad back.⁶² (. . .) I searched and found it with difficulty, only by the indication of a rough wooden cross stuck between some boulders on which was written in red paint "My Lord and My God". The paint is chipped and fading; no one goes today to the little muddy pool hidden beneath a clump of fuchsia.⁶³

Some confusion exists with regard to the name St. Mona being attributed to both of these wells. I haven't been able to find a definite answer to that question. I have presented the information I have been able to verify above. Unfortunately, it seems that any more information about these sites may now be lost in the past.



Notice for Millennium Celebrations courtesy of Matt Murphy, Sherkin Island Marine Station.

⁶¹ Matt Kelleher, Archaeologist, National Monuments Service. Pers. Comm. (07/07/2018).

⁶² Peter Somerville-Large, *The Coast of West Cork*, (Appletree Press, Belfast. 1991). P. 75. This book was originally published in hardback in 1972.

⁶³ Ibid.

The Old Chapel (Penal Chapel)

According to local tradition, and backed by documentary evidence, the former church on Sherkin was located in the townland of Cloddagh adjoining the townland of Kilmoon. This building has been a ruin for more than two hundred years; indeed a reference from 1824 describes it as ‘a miserable hovel without doors or windows’ (see below ‘*On the Disturbances in Ireland*’). It has always been referred to locally as ‘The Old Chapel’ and sometimes, ‘The Penal Chapel’ and within living memory, a family called Roche, (who has since died out on Sherkin), were in charge of keeping the entrance blocked so that cattle could not enter the place. The field adjoining the building on the west side was called *Gáirdín na Séipéal* (Chapel Garden).⁶⁴ This church is recorded on the Grand Jury map of 1811 (below) but it is not known how old it was at that date.



Grand Juries were established in the eighteenth century to determine whether there was a good case for a criminal prosecution to take place. Later they took over some of the functions that are now carried out by county councils. Bridge building, road maintenance, and the building of fever hospitals were some of the duties carried out by Grand Juries. The poor law unions took over most of these functions in 1840 and county councils took over any remaining fiscal and administrative functions after the Local Government Act of 1898.

Neville Bath's map for the Grand Jury of Cork was surveyed in the 1790s and published in 1811.

The map is one of the best and most detailed maps of the county before the Ordnance Survey maps of the 1840s. It is a treasure trove for geographers, historians, and place-name specialists. The scale of the published map is three-quarters of an inch to one mile (1: 84480)⁶⁵ Sherkin church shown on the map is now a complete ruin. As already mentioned, this church was in a terrible condition as far back as 1824:

⁶⁴ John Norris, Sherkin Island. Co. Cork. Pers. Comm. (23/05/2018).

⁶⁵ <http://www.corkpastandpresent.ie/mapsimages/grandjurymapofcountycork1811/> [Accessed: 2015/02/12]. N.B. The red circle indicating the church is inserted by author and not part of original map.

The Rev., Michael Collins, P.P., Skibbereen, Later Bishop of Cloyne and Ross. 14 June, 1824. (*On the Disturbances in Ireland*).

"Have you known of the collection of church rates, of rates for building and repairing churches, produce disturbances in the parts of Ireland with which you are acquainted?"

"Yes, very recently."

"Will you explain the circumstances?"

"The island of Inisherkin is a small island forming part of the parish of Tullagh and being off the harbour of Baltimore. The island is not in my district, but the main part of the parish is; it is separated from the mainland by a distance of about a mile. The inhabitants are about a thousand having about two hundred houses. They are very poor; so much so that when an attempt was made by the priest residing there, not long since, to levy an assessment of threepence-halfpenny per household for the repair of the old chapel which was in utter ruin, (it was a mere hovel partly covered with ragged straw and without a door or a window), he failed in raising that sum from their inability to pay it; and shortly after the churchwarden residing on the mainland came with his assistants to levy a tax of four shillings and six pence in the gneeve, imposed by the church vestry, for the repayment of a sum of money, advanced by the Board of First Fruits for the building of a church on the mainland to which they were not liable. The common people thought it hard and unnatural, that whereas they could not contribute anything to shelter themselves from the wind and rain in their chapel, they should be obliged to pay a heavy tax for a church not on the island but far from them; and particularly when they recollected that that church was built more for ornament than for use; inasmuch as another church had previously existed in another part of the parish, which might have been kept in good repair at a moderate expense. But it was deemed more ornamental and more picturesque to transfer the site of the church to a prominent point at the opening of the harbour, where it would have a pretty effect on the landscape. The church was built there and a tax has been, these five years, annually levied upon the poor population for the building of that church unnecessary both in the minds of Catholics and Protestants, for the Protestant clergyman was, as I heard, against the building of that church; so the people resisted the payment of that tax though the priest and I who had occasion to go there remonstrated with them upon the folly of their attempting to resist in that way; but they are very warm in the expression of their passions and they said they would sooner die than pay such an unnatural tax as that; nevertheless it was levied and they resisted.

An order came down from the castle in Dublin that the police should be sent there and an old woman was brought out and was to be tried at the last sessions in Skibbereen for this breach of law, yet their own chapel is in ruins."⁶⁶

⁶⁶ The evidence taken before the select committees of the houses of Lords and Commons, appointed in the sessions of 1824 and 1825, to inquire into the state of Ireland. P.112
<https://archive.org/details/evidencetakenbef00grea/page/112> [Accessed: 2018/10/02].

This chapel is also referred to in *History of West Cork and the Diocese of Ross* by Fr. W. Holland (1949). "The ruins of the ancient old church may still be inspected in the townland of Kilmoon on the hill north of the present church and close to the Silver Strand."⁶⁷

The following reference from the *Schools Manuscripts Collection* refers to the church thus:

There is an old church in Cloddagh and it is said that this is the church that was kept by St. Mona. The four walls of the church can still be seen and the steps leading up to the altar are there as well. Some people say that St Mona is buried in South Kilmoon in a place called 'The School Well' which is situated at the side of the small Cuinne. No one knows her feast day. There is no one named Mona on the island now. There was a cairn here years ago but it is not there now.⁶⁸

Bruno O' Donoghue in his book entitled: *Parish Histories and Place Names of West Cork* gives this townland as Kilmoon (Cill Mughaine):

St. Mughain's Church. St Mughain was believed to be a relative of St. Ciaran the patron saint of Cape Clear, the island beside Sherkin. A papal document of 1199 mentions a parish called Cell Mugan which might be equated with this townland.⁶⁹

The following reference, verbatim, is from a local man interviewed in 1990 (then aged 72) and refers to this chapel:

"...a sunbeam stretching from whatever window was in it, a shaft of sunlight...you'd often see it if there was dust in the air, and he slung his overcoat on it and it stayed up – well now, t'was an unlikely story but my grandfather used to tell me that, so it was some sort of place of congregation alright."⁷⁰

Mass houses continued to be generally tolerated and had become the norm in much of the country by the time of the 1731 report on the State of Popery.⁷¹ There is not much physical evidence of Penal chapels or Mass houses surviving today although in rural areas some of these buildings are indicated in the first-edition six inch Ordnance Survey maps usually as 'R.C. Chapel (in ruins)'.⁷² Sherkin Island was surveyed as part of the Ordnance Survey in 1842 by which time the present church had been in existence for about ten years. This may

⁶⁷ The site of the old/penal chapel is actually in the townland of Cloddagh, a fact that could be easily overlooked unless one had access to a detailed map of the area. The townlands of Cloddagh and Kilmona border each other.

⁶⁸ The Schools' Collection, Volume 0295, Page 212 (National Folklore Collection. UCD) (<https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/4798750/4795615?pageNum=212>) [Accessed: 2018/08/15]. Translated from the Irish by Óisín Ó Raghallaigh, Sherkin Island.

⁶⁹ Bruno O' Donoghue, *Parish Histories and Placenames of West Cork*, (The Kerryman Ltd., Tralee, 1983). P. 36.

⁷⁰ James O' Driscoll, Sherkin Island, Co. Cork. Pers. Comm. [1990].

⁷¹ Eamonn Cotter, 'Architectural change and the parish church in post-reformation Cork' in *The Parish in Medieval and Early Modern Ireland Community Territory and Building* (eds.), Elizabeth Fitzpatrick and Raymond Gillespie, (Four Courts Press, Dublin. 2006). P.272.

⁷² Ibid.

explain why its ruined predecessor was not *indicated as a former church* on the map even though the actual building is shown.

Location

The site is located in a secluded spot overlooking *Traigh Eoghan Mhor* strand (sometimes called *Cows' Strand*) in a north-northwest facing hollow. One of the most striking aspects of these remains is that they are almost always located in remote areas.⁷³ This is certainly true of the church ruins on Sherkin, hidden amongst the humps and hollows of rough land which is used now for cattle grazing. Immediately to the south of the chapel the land rises and levels off into a flat area. The chapel is flanked by fields on the right and the left, and to the north the land dips and is skirted by an old cart-road which leads to a little inlet, where in former times, seaweed and sand were collected by farmers for use as fertilizer.

Type of Building

Most chapels from the earlier medieval period were laid out to a standard blueprint but these later Mass houses were distinguished architecturally by a complete lack of uniformity of plan.⁷⁴ Sherkin's Penal chapel is an example. It is built in a N/S direction as opposed to the E/W direction in which local houses are generally built. However, the actual building may have been oriented this way for practical reasons given the poor condition of the land. It is a single-celled room with an opening in each gable. Both of these openings seem to have been doors as they reach ground level. This raises the question of where the altar would have been placed. There appears to have been a window opening in the east wall and perhaps a make-shift altar was placed there temporarily during the celebration of Mass, and removed after the service. Churches at this time had no fixed furniture or altars and the buildings were often multi-purpose.⁷⁵ The reference above from 1824, says that it was 'a hovel without a door or window.' I assume this means that the openings for doors and a window existed but were neither fitted with doors as usual or glazed in the case of the window. That would also fit with the very decrepit condition of the building at that time. The building was constructed of dry-stone walls. The depiction on the Grand Jury map (above) shows a little building with a spire; however, that is the symbol the mapmaker used to denote a church and had no bearing on the actual physical appearance of the church in question.⁷⁶

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid. P. 273.

⁷⁵ Daniel Gallogly, 'The Diocese of Kilmore, 1800-1950' in Emmet Larkin, *The Pastoral Role of the Roman Catholic Church in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1750-1850* (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2006). P.169

⁷⁶ Paul Ferguson, Map Librarian, Trinity College, Dublin. Pers. Comm. (02/07/2018).



SW/NE. Silver Strand barely visible in middle distance. The centre section of the east wall has fallen down, or maybe was a window opening, and the wall is misaligned and sagging. The west wall is in better condition. (Photo: Dolly O Reilly, 2006).



N/S. South gable exit infilled with stones. Rod is 1m. (Photo: Dolly O Reilly, 2006).⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Thanks to Charlie Green, Sherkin Island, who helped with the examination of the site in 2006.



NW/SE. Figure (Charlie Green) standing in north gable where a door opening may have existed. Note the poor land condition surrounding the ruin. (Photo: Dolly O Reilly, 2006).



W/E. Section of the west wall, built of local sandstone. (Photo: Dolly O Reilly, 2006).



S/N. Exit/door in south gable. *Dreoilín* (Wren) Point in background. (Photo: Dolly O Reilly, 2006).



S/N. Note cart track to right of picture. This track is 2.30m wide. Mount Gabriel, Schull, to mid-right in background. *Dreoilín* Point in middle distance. (Photo: Dolly O Reilly, 2006).



N/S. New house on level ground above the chapel ruin. Note the rocky outcrop directly behind the south gable of the church ruin which helped to conceal the site. (Photo: Dolly O' Reilly, 2006).

Dimensions of the Chapel:

	Length	Highest Point	Lowest Point	Width	Wall Depth (Thickness)
East Wall	13.95 m (46 ft)	1.58 m (5 ft)	.86 m (3 ft)		.84 m (2.75 ft)
West Wall	15.86 m (52 ft)	1.69 m (5.5 ft)	.90 m (2.9 ft)		.86 m (2.8 ft)
North Gable	4.90 m (16 ft)				.77 m (2.5 ft)
South Gable	5.80 m (19 ft)				.81 m (2.6 ft)
South Gable Exit				104 cm (3.4 ft)	
North Gable Exit				104 cm (3.4 ft) Based on south gable	

Church Building in the 19th Century

The number of churches built between 1820 and 1850 was a remarkable achievement given the poverty at the time.⁷⁸ They were an improvement on what they replaced because they were built of stone and slated but they were still very basic. They had no decoration or furnishing and lacked architectural features. They were described in the Valuation Books in the 1830s as unfinished with no interior fittings, ceiling, flooring, plastering or decoration.⁷⁹ They had no fixed altar, seating, confessionals, or devotional aids like statues or pictures. They were functional buildings used only for the celebration of Sunday Mass. During the week they were used for other purposes such as threshing corn, as schools and for political meetings.⁸⁰

I was not able to locate specific information about the actual building of Sherkin church. However it fits in with the description above. It was built within that time period; it was constructed of stone, slated and un-plastered inside until the 1940s when it was renovated. I could find no reference to its having been thatched.⁸¹ The slate may have been produced locally because at that date slate quarries were operating in the Horseshoe Harbour area. Early maps of the island also show disused slate quarries on the south side of Sliabh Mór. Local stone was probably used in the building.⁸² Sandstone from Sherkin was used in building works in Skibbereen. It was transported up the Ilan River in boats with a carrying capacity of between 12 and 14 tons. A ledge of rock which had caused an obstruction on the river was removed to enable passage of boats of this size. The Roman Catholic church in Skibbereen was built with sandstone from Sherkin as well as many other buildings in the neighbourhood.⁸³

Samuel Lewis, in his *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* described Sherkin church as 'a small, neat edifice with a good residence nearby for the Roman Catholic clergyman.'⁸⁴ This is ambiguous as he does not say specifically that the priest's house is attached to the main church building. If it was a later addition it must have been built within about ten years of the church as the first Ordnance Survey map (1842) shows the priest's house attached to the main building. Lewis also noted that there was a congregation of about 400 at that time.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Daniel Gallogly, 'The Diocese of Kilmore, 1800-1950' in Emmet Larkin, *The Pastoral Role of the Roman Catholic Church in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1750-1850* (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2006). P.169.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Interestingly, Eamon Lankford says that the Roman Catholic church on Cape Clear, built about 1839, was originally thatched, then slated using local slate, but these were of a poor quality so the roof had to be re-slated with imported slates in 1855. (*Cape Clear Island; Its People and Landscape*, 1999).

⁸² Clegg confirms this in his article on the refurbishments carried out in the late 1940s (see page 34).

⁸³ George Wilkinson, *Practical Geology and Ancient Architecture in Ireland*, (London & Dublin, 1845). P. 173

⁸⁴ Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, (<https://www.libraryireland.com/topog/I/Innisharkin-West-Carbery-Cork.php>). [Accessed:2018/10/17].

⁸⁵ Ibid.

The annex that is now the sacristy was a later addition, built for use as a soup kitchen during the potato famine. Within living memory some of the older islanders referred to the sacristy as the 'soup house'.⁸⁶

ENCLOSURE.

Assistant Commissary-General BISHOP to Sir R. ROUTH.

Skibbereen, February 7, 1847.

I HAVE the honour to report that during the past week, I have revisited the several districts of Baltimore, Ballydehob, Skull, Crookhaven, &c.

It was with regret I found that owing to the want of boilers, the soup kitchens proposed for the Islands of Shirken and Clear, had not come into operation. I urged upon the Soup Committee to send an immediate supply of biscuit, rice, and peas, from Baltimore, to these islands, the issue to be supported from the soup funds, until the arrival of boilers.

As the above extract⁸⁷ shows, by February of 1847 this soup kitchen was not functioning due to the lack of boilers. By the autumn of that year the government had put an end to the soup kitchen famine-relief scheme, and subsequently this extension became the sacristy. Originally, there was a connecting door between the priest's house and the church which was located behind the present statue of Our Lady on the left side of the altar. This would have allowed the priest to prepare for mass in his house and enter the church by that door. Sherkin had a population of just over one thousand in 1831. This meant that there were plenty of local men to provide labour for building. The work may have been overseen by master masons from outside the community as was the case in Schull, but this is not certain. Schull Catholic church was built in 1826 by masons from Wales who were already building houses in the area.⁸⁸

How Church Building Was Financed

Generally, financial aid to support the upsurge in church building in the first half of the nineteenth century came from a variety of sources. Affluent Catholic families of the merchant, professional and tenant-farmer classes as well as some members of the gentry and the poor of the parishes contributed. There were also regular donations from the rich and the poor contributed through weekly collections. People from all classes helped out, not just financially but by giving their time, skill and labour for free.⁸⁹

There is no doubt, however, that raising enough money for these buildings was often a slow and arduous process. This is exemplified locally in the case of Skibbereen where Fr. Michael Collins (who gave the account of the old chapel on Sherkin in 1824, seen above) describes the terrible state of the Catholic church in that town in 1825 and outlines his attempts to raise enough money to build a new one. The existing church was then in such bad condition that he feared for the safety of his congregation. The condition of the building was exacerbated by the fact that it was far too small for the size of the congregation and half of

⁸⁶ John Norris, Sherkin Island. Pers Comm. (01/06/2018).

⁸⁷ Parliamentary Papers, Vol. 52. P. 40 (<https://books.google.ie/books?id=yHOSAAAAYAAJ&pg=RA3-PA32&dq=Assistant+Commissary+General+Bishop+to+Sir+R.+Routh++7th++February+1847&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewj4tPDtwKbdAhVilcAKHeSkBM0Q6AEILTAB#v=onepage&q=Assistant%20Commissary%20General%20%20Bishop%20to%20Sir%20R%20Routh%20Skibbereen%2C%20February%207th%2C1847&f=false>). [Accessed: 2018/09/06].

⁸⁸ <http://mizenparish.com/schull/story-of-the-church/> [Accessed: 2018/09/24].

⁸⁹ Brendan Grimes, 'Funding a Roman Catholic Church in Nineteenth-Century Ireland' in https://www.jstor.org/stable/20623026?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents [Accessed: 2018/09/24].

them were forced to worship outside the church in all types of weather and where they could not hear the instructions of the priest. The only money he had was the halfpenny collections from Sunday Mass. Many were too poor to pay even this. Collins, who succeeded William Coppinger as Bishop of Cloyne and Ross in 1831, eventually raised enough money to build the church which was completed in 1831.⁹⁰

To get an idea of what it may have cost to build Sherkin church, we can look at examples of similar churches from the same time frame; for example, an average barn chapel in the 1830s cost about £500 and a fine cut-stone church cost about £1,150.⁹¹ Sherkin church is classed as a typical single cell barn-type design of the early nineteenth century.⁹² The cost of building was probably close to the £500 figure. An example of a fine cut-stone church would be St. Patricks, in Skibbereen to which I have referred above. Although Sherkin church is stone built and slated, it would be a very basic structure in comparison to any of the far larger, cut-stone churches.⁹³

Changes to St. Mona's church

This photograph is one of the earliest available and shows the church around the turn of the 20th century.



Image Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland. (2020/11/24).

Note the external Holy Water font beside the front door, the slated west gable and the cross on the bell cote. The font is now located on the wall directly beside the door. An internal wooden porch was built later, possibly during renovations in the late 1940s. Before this

⁹⁰ Emmet Larkin, *The Pastoral Role of the Roman Catholic Church in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1750-1850* (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2006). Pp.175, 176.

⁹¹ Daniel Gallogly, 'The Diocese of Kilmore, 1800-1950' in Emmet Larkin, *The Pastoral Role of the Roman Catholic Church in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1750-1850* (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2006). P.169.

⁹² National Inventory of Architectural Heritage:

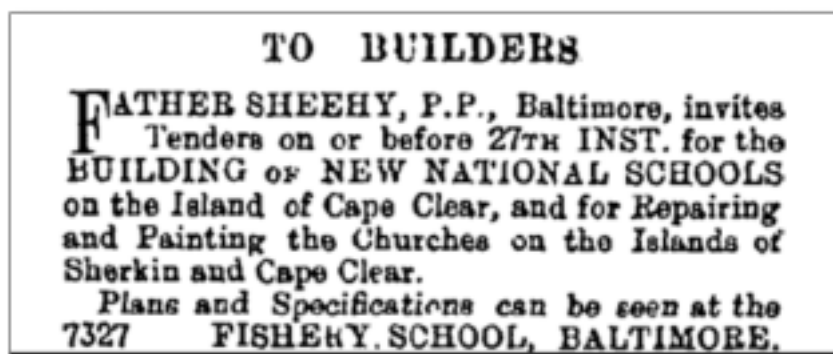
<http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/niah/search.jsp?type=record&county=CO®no=20914906> [Accessed: 2018/08/07].

⁹³ These figures are based on similar examples from the same time period and may not be exact.

time a local man, named Gosnell, used to sit on a stool outside the door and take the collection from people going in to Mass.⁹⁴

The low grey partially visible house in the background on the left of the road is now owned by Ber Burns and Fergus Murphy. It was known locally as 'Jacks' in the 1970s by which time it was a ruin and had a tree growing inside it. The boats in *Cuinne* (Kinish) harbour in the background brought merchandise to the island. The goods were ferried onto the island in smaller boats called lighters.

At around the time this photograph was taken, contractors were being sought to carry out painting and repairs to the church:



Cork Examiner, 23rd October, 1895. P. 2

Ringling the Church Bell

Fr. Coombes, who was resident priest on Sherkin in the late 1950s told me the following story about a visitor who was passing the church one day years ago, at about half an hour past noon. A local man was ringing the bells for the Angelus.⁹⁵ When the visitor pointed out that the Angelus bells should be rung at noon, he was told that since nobody in particular was assigned to the task, then whoever happened to be passing the church closest to the correct time performed this duty.⁹⁶

A set of electric bells was installed in the church in 1990s but suffered damage in a subsequent storm and have not been re-installed.

⁹⁴ Mary O' Reilly, Sherkin Island. Co. Cork. Pers. Comm. [2014].

⁹⁵ In Catholic countries in Early Christian times, a custom of reciting three Hail Marys in honour of Our Lady, as the Mother of God, was practiced. Originally this was done towards evening when local monasteries were chanting that part of the Divine Office called Compline. Over the years, this custom expanded to include a morning and a noon recitation of the Angelus prayer.

<http://catholicism.org/origin-of-the-angelus.html> [Accessed: 2018/10/27].

⁹⁶ Fr. James Coombes, Parochial House, Timoleague, Co. Cork. Pers. Comm. [1992].

Refurbishment

Major refurbishments were carried out on Sherkin church in 1949/50. Just prior to this, a visitor, Mr. Clegg, wrote about the island in general and gives a description of the church in 1948:

The church is a simple aisle-less building in the local stone, plastered without but the inner walls are rough. To my mind this gave the building a nobility which I fear will be spoilt when a new scheme authorised by the bishop is put into effect, for the inside is to be plastered and painted. There is a wooden reredos⁹⁷ in renaissance style, bearing such symbols as the pelican, the vine and so on. There is a fine statue of Our Lady and a rather ordinary one of the Sacred Heart.⁹⁸

The statues of Our Lady and the Sacred Heart which flank the altar were donated by Florence O' Neill, Island House. Other donations included a pair of silver candlesticks, gifted to the church by Mr. Batt Roche. These candlesticks were later removed to the Parish Church in Rath.

Mr Clegg further described the weekday and Sunday Masses on Sherkin:

Even at weekday Mass the altar boys appear in cassock and surplice and bare feet, but strangely enough it did not strike me as in any way inappropriate. Sunday Mass was, of course, quite different. Not only did all the children wear shoes, but everyone appeared in their best and looked supremely uncomfortable. Magnificent hats and caps were produced and the girls showed their femininity by a rather indiscreet use of cosmetics. With the exception of one Joe Beamish everyone on the island is Catholic and incidentally, far from being the odd man out, Beamish is deservedly popular. The result is that Sunday is a great day. At the time of Mass the entire population can be seen converging on the church, some on foot, some on bicycles, others by the small carts drawn mainly by donkeys but occasionally by a horse which are the standard means of transport. A whole line of these vehicles stands outside the church during Mass. The people are devout. Many of them attend two or three masses on Sunday and during week-days as well. They seem to be well informed on religious questions and were not in any way the slaves of superstition which some sectarian propaganda would have us believe.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ An ornamental screen covering the wall at the back of an altar.

⁹⁸ A Lindsay Clegg, *Sherkin Island (Art)*, 1948, in Paddy O Keefe Papers, Cork City and County Archives, Blackpool, Cork City.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

The advertisement calling for contractors to carry out the refurbishment referred to in the extract above:

**NOTICE TO BUILDING
CONTRACTORS**

SHERKIN ISLAND CHURCH.

TENDERS are invited from competent Contractors for the re-slating, plastering, and other works at Sherkin Island Church, Co. Cork, for the Most Reverend D. Moynihan, D.D., Lord Bishop of Ross, in accordance with the Drawings and Specification prepared by J. R. Boyd Barrett, Architect, 61, South Mall, Cork.

Drawings and Specification may be inspected at the Presbytery, Sherkin Island, and at the Architect's Office.

Copies thereof, together with Form of Tender, may be obtained from the Architect on a deposit of £2, which will be returned on receipt of a bona-fide tender.

Tenders on the Form supplied must be lodged with the Architect not later than noon on Tuesday, 6th April, 1948.

By Order,
**J. R. BOYD BARRETT, A.R.I.B.A.,
F.R.I.A.I., 61, South Mall, Cork.**

Cork Examiner Newspaper, 13th March, 1948. P.5.

In the meantime, the resident priest, Fr. Florence O' Flynn was carrying out a robust fund-raising campaign to finance these renovations. Notices appeared in the local papers, sometimes almost weekly, advertising these events. Fr. O' Flynn was a friend of the famous Scottish tenor, Fr. Sydney MacEwan since they had studied together in Rome.¹⁰⁰ It was at the request of Fr. O' Flynn that Fr. MacEwan gave the concerts detailed below, in Cork Opera House and in Skibbereen, to fundraise for Sherkin church. These were Fr. MacEwan's first public concerts since he had ended a promising career as a singer to study for the church some years previously.

¹⁰⁰ *Cork Examiner Newspaper, 17th November, 1962. P. 15.*

CORK OVATION FOR FR. McEWAN

Scottish Singer's Fine Recital

For long minutes after the last sweet notes of the plaintive Scottish ballad "Mary Shaw" had faded away, the Cork Opera House yesterday afternoon resounded to tumultuous rounds of enthusiastic applause, as the capacity audience which crammed the theatre "to the roof" expressed their appreciation and admiration of the singing of the celebrated Scottish tenor, Rev. Sydney McEwan.

Making his first public appearance since his ordination, Fr. McEwan, whose voice is a household word with music-lovers the world over, captivated completely his listeners on this, his first concert, to an Irish audience. Though the passing of the years may have left their mark on its volume, and, to a lesser degree, on its range, his voice has lost none of its pristine purity. Strikingly reminiscent of the late John Count MacCormack in his interpretations of the folk-songs of his native land, Fr. McEwan treated those present to no fewer than a dozen songs, gracefully acceding to the insistent demands for encores. His every appearance on the stage was the signal for a spontaneous outburst, as he was greeted with the plaudits of the delighted hundreds who were lucky enough to be present.

On his first appearance, Fr. McEwan opened with two Italian songs, which he sang in Italian, "Sento Nel Core" (Scarlatti) and "O Del Mio Amato Eon" (Donaudy) and concluded with Handel's well-known "Where E'er You Walk." His second group saw him in much more impressive voice, for there was no doubting the beauty of his renderings of three popular Scottish ballads or the appreciation which they evoked and with which they were received, "Afton Water," "Mary of Argyle" and "Bonnie Strathvire."

Fr. McEwan was even more pleasing still in his third and last group, the Hebridean "Island Shieling Song," Thomas Moore's "Meeting of the Waters" and the Basque Christmas carol "O Bethlehem." The audience was still not satisfied until he had given two encores which were a fitting climax to his splendid singing, one of them being one of the songs by which, perhaps, he is best known, the ever-popular "The Road To The Isles," and he completed a magnificent performance with a sweet rendering of another charming ballad, "Mary Shaw."

CHARLES LYNCH RECITAL.

Another celebrity to appear on the programme, which was in aid of the Sherkin Island Church, Baltimore, Co. Cork, was the noted pianist, Charles Lynch. In his faultless interpretation and execution of selections from the works of Chopin, Ravel, Ibert and Debussy, he displayed the masterly touch which has always stamped his recitals with the hall-mark of quality. Here again, encores were insisted upon and given, and here, again, the audience showed their appreciation in no uncertain fashion.

To complete the recital, the No. 2 Army Band, under the baton of Lieut. R. B. Kealy, Mus. Bac., delighted with a selection of popular and classical items which included the Overture to "William Tell" and four movements from Tschaikowski's "Nutcracker Suite."

Fr. McEwan's accompanist was Michael O'Callaghan, Mus. Bac.

Cork Examiner, 15th January, 1948. P. 3

Baltimore Function.— A packed audience enjoyed a concert presented in the School Hall, Baltimore, on Sunday night in aid of the **Sherkin Church Renovation Fund**. Two plays were produced, those who took part in them being Messrs. Paddy O'Regan, Willie O'Donovan, Christy McMahon, John O'Reilly, Miss Una O'Sullivan, Miss Mary Nolan and Miss Virginia McCarthy. Items were contributed by children, a group from Clonakilty including Michael McCarthy, Donal O'Mahony, Noreen Linsahan and Mrs. Maloney, as well as local juveniles Catherine, Eileen and Bridie O'Driscoll, being well received. Violin selections were given by Mr. Denis O'Driscoll, Sherkin, and songs by Mr. Michael O'Donoghue. Contributions were also given by boys from Baltimore Fishery School. Rev. F. O'Flynn, C.C., Sherkin, thanked the artistes and audience.

Source: *Southern Star* January 22nd, 1949. P. 6

It is interesting to see which Sherkin Islanders took part in these entertainments; Paddy O'Regan (who came from the house now owned by Gerry Creagh's family), Willie O'Donovan (Horseshoe House), Christy McMahon (Baltimore Fisheries School and employee in Horseshoe House), John O'Reilly, Sherkin Island, Mary Nolan (sister of John Willie Nolan, Ferryman) and Virginia McCarthy (mother of Tony O'Driscoll, The Cove, Baltimore).

Concert
 (In aid of **Sherkin Church Renovation Fund**)
IN THE C.Y.M.S. HALL,
SCHULL
ON SUNDAY, 30th JANUARY,
 Commencing 8.30 p.m. sharp.
Artists from Clonakilty and Sherkin
will attend.
ADMISSION 2/6
Southern Star, Saturday, January 29th, 1949. P. 8.

OVATION FOR PRIEST

Captivating Song Recital at Skibbereen In Aid of Church Fund

Possessing a voice of remarkable sweetness, Rev. Sydney MacEwan, the celebrated Scottish tenor, captivated a capacity audience in the cinema, Skibbereen, on Friday night of last week when he gave a recital at a concert in aid of the Sherkin Church Renovation Fund. It was Fr. MacEwan's first appearance in public since his ordination, he having sung at the Opera House, Cork, for the same object on the previous Wednesday. Fr. MacEwan sang seven songs, four of them being ballads of his native land. His interpretation of these in particular was marked by an artistry that was at once charming and instructive. The years may have left their mark on the volume of his voice but its purity of tone and soft clarity were as pronounced as when he rose to fame over a decade ago as a layman.

Work of Art

The delicacy with which he rendered the Scottish folk songs reminded one most forcibly of that superb mastery cultivated by the late Count John McCormick, especially in the middle and lower registers. Feeling and skill combined to render his singing a real work of art.

He opened his recital with the Italian aria "Sento Nel Core" following with the charming, plaintive ballad "Mary Shaw". Perhaps most beautiful was his rendering of the Hebridean folk song "Island Sheiling", and solemnly impressive was the Basque Christmas carol "O Bethlehem". His second series were Moore's "Meeting of the Waters", Burns' "Strathyre" and "The Road to the Isles". Sustained applause greeted his singing and after he had left the stage continued for many minutes.

Expression of Thanks

Rev. Florence O' Flynn, C.C., Sherkin, who had organised the concerts, in thanking the people said that it was with deep regret that Fr. MacEwan had to decline to sing more songs

as he had to leave for Cork that night and for Glasgow on the following morning. He felt they all recognised the signal privilege they had enjoyed that night by hearing the beautiful voice of Fr. MacEwan, who would bring back with him to his native Scotland, happy memories of his visit to West Cork. Appropriately enough, Father MacEwan had sung "The Road to the Isles" as his parting song. That song referred to the isles of his own Scotland but he had also seen the islands of West Cork when he visited Sherkin and he felt that Carbery's Hundred Isles would hold a cherished place in his heart just like those off the coast of his native land.

Before leaving Father MacEwan bade goodbye to Most Rev. Dr. Moynihan, Bishop of Ross who was present at the concert. Leaving the cinema, Father MacEwan was loudly applauded.

Other Contributors

Others who contributed items were Miss Eileen Curran, Cork; (recitations), Miss Eileen O' Regan, Sherkin (songs); Mr. Bill Rice, Cork; (songs), Mr. Michael O' Callaghan, Mus. B., (Irish Country Songs); Mr. Dick Donegan (guitarist) and Mr. Danny Hobbs, (comedian). Fr. MacEwan's accompanist was Mr. O' Callaghan.

Southern Star, 24th January, 1948.



Fr. Sydney MacEwan. [1908-1999].

S P L E N D I D
Concert

(In aid of Sherkin Church
Renovation Fund)

IN THE HALL, GOLEEN
ON SUNDAY, 19th FEBRUARY.
Commencing 8.30 p.m. sharp.
Artists from Clonakilty and Sherkin
will attend.
ADMISSION ... 2/6 & 1/6.
Don't miss the Concert which is
still the talk of Schull. 950-1

Southern Star, February 12th, 1949. P. 7

GRAND VARIETY
Concert
IN THE CINEMA,
SKIBBEREEN

ON FRIDAY, JUNE 3rd, 1949.
(In aid of Sherkin Church
Renovation Fund)

Special attractions include: Gay
Ninety Scene in Tableaux, also that
immortal South-Sea Island Scene:
Treasure Island, with full tropical
Settings and Colours.

We also take pleasure in presenting
some of the leading Vocal and Musical
Talent of the County.

Come and hear the favourite songs
of Granny's Day. Also two very laugh-
able comedies: "Broken Vows," and
"Murphy's International Hotel."

Don't miss this great treat with
cast of over 40 artists, all from Clona-
kilty.

Commencing at 9 p.m.
**ADMISSION, 3/- (Reserved); 2/-
and 1/-.**

Seats may be booked at P. Carey's,
The Bridge, Skibbereen. 'Phone 49.
(969)-1

Southern Star May 21st, 1949. P. 8

Grand VARIETY CONCERT
IN THE CINEMA, CLONAKILTY
On Wednesday, June 1st

(In aid of Sherkin Church Renovation Fund)

ARTISTS will include: Barry O'Leary, Michael O'Callaghan, Dick
Donegan, Edna McBirney, Terry Long and his Piano Accordeon, Barry
O'Mahony, the Boy Conjuror, and Cecil Sheehan, all of Cork.

DON'T MISS THIS GREAT CONCERT

Commencing at 9 p.m.

ADMISSION—2/6 (Reserved); 2/- and 1/-.

Seats may be Reserved at Messrs Blewitt's, Rossa Street, Clonakilty.

GRAND
VARIETY CONCERT
IN THE CINEMA, SKIBBEREEN
On Friday, June 3rd

(In aid of Sherkin Church Renovation Fund)

SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS include: Gay Ninety Scene in Tableaux, also
that immortal South-Sea Island Scene: Treasure Island, with full tropical
Settings and Colours.

We also take pleasure in presenting some of the leading Vocal and Musical
Talent of the County.

Come and hear the favourite songs of Granny's day. Also two very laugh-
able comedies: "Broken Vows," and "Murphy's International Hotel."

Don't miss this great treat with cast of over 40 artists, all from Clonakilty.

Commencing at 9 p.m.

ADMISSION—3/- (Reserved); 2/- and 1/-.

Seats may be booked at P. Carey's, The Bridge, Skibbereen. 'Phone 49.
(169)-1

Southern Star Saturday May 28th, 1949. P. 8.

By early March 1951, the church had been refurbished at a cost of £3,500.¹⁰¹ The stained glass windows replaced older windows that contained panes of red and blue glass. The terrazzo flooring which covers the aisle and the section of floor inside the main entrance was donated by the Curtin family of Cork city who also donated the west window.¹⁰² Tom Curtin and family used to holiday in 'Nans', the house below the church on the right hand side of the road which belongs to the Norris family. This floor was laid down in the early 1950s. The main flooring was donated by Mr., and Mrs. Macon O' Driscoll and Mr., and Mrs. Pat Walsh (as stated on the plaque on their family pew).

A letter from His Lordship, Most Rev. D. Moynihan, dated March 9th, 1951, was sent to Fr. O' Flynn, C.C., Sherkin Island, to officially mark the completion of the restoration work:

Dear Fr. O' Flynn,

I should like to compliment you, your Parish Priest and all your Benefactors on the work of renovation which has made Sherkin church the best island church I know and the most tastefully furnished and finished small church in the diocese of Ross.

I should be very grateful if you would say a word of thanks to all who have helped you; but I should be especially grateful if you would be good enough to thank, in my name, the good people of Sherkin, who by their readiness to cooperate with you from the very beginning of the work, their genuine interest in the work and their extraordinary generosity, have helped to make God's house in their island a fitting home for the Eucharistic Presence.

May he, to the beautifying of whose house they have so willingly contributed their time, their labour and their money, abundantly bless and reward them.

I am, dear Fr. O' Flynn,

Yours sincerely,

+ D. Moynihan.

On Friday November 28th, 1958, a new tabernacle (the gift of Rev. Fr. Chapple, P.P., St. Bernadette's, Bournemouth, visitor to Sherkin since 1937) and a new crucifix were installed in the church, replacing the old tabernacle and throne, said to be installed by the late Monsignor Hill, curate in Sherkin in 1895-96.¹⁰³

The altar and altar background area were completely redesigned in the late 1970s/early 1980s by Kevin O' Reilly*

¹⁰¹ Information from *Sherkin Baptism Register 1851-1960*. Skibbereen Presbytery, Skibbereen, Co. Cork (2012).

¹⁰² Information on pew plaques, Sherkin Island church.

¹⁰³ Information from *Sherkin Baptism Register 1851-1960*. Skibbereen Presbytery, Skibbereen, Co. Cork (2012).

* Kevin O' Reilly and his family have had a holiday home on Sherkin for many years; this is the same home that is now occupied by Kevin's daughter Karen and her family.

Repairs to Rath Churches in 1989

The next major renovations to Sherkin church took place in the early 1990s. Fr. Owen Cashman, then parish priest of Rath and the Islands held a public meeting in Baltimore and the fund-raising drive started. This is outlined in the newspaper report below:

Rath Churches in Need of Repairs

Over £50,000 is urgently needed for repairs to three churches in the parish of Rath and the Islands. A fund-raising committee, determined to reach the target within twelve months, was set up on Thursday night last, following a public meeting held at the Beacon Park Hotel, Baltimore. Top priority goes to the church on Sherkin Island. An estimated £50,000 is needed for the work which includes re-slating, treatment of rotting timbers and central heating. Fr. Owen Cashman told The *Southern Star* that conditions in both Sherkin and Cape Clear churches are “bitterly cold” during the winter months because of grossly inadequate heating systems which have all but packed up. It is expected that the cost of installing a new heating system in the Cape Clear church and fitting double-glazed windows will cost in the region of £8,000. A further £10,000 is needed to install toilet facilities and paint the interior and exterior of Rath, Baltimore church. From the large attendance at the public meeting, twelve people volunteered to organise the fund-raising drive to cover the costs of the Sherkin project, which has already commenced, and to cover the cost of completing all the work. According to Fr. Cashman, the people who attended the meeting are very committed and he is very hopeful that the appeal will be met with a generous response from everyone in the parish. It was suggested that a house-to-house collection would be undertaken and that house holders would be asked to subscribe what they can afford on a weekly or monthly basis to the fund. Although the area has a small population of eight hundred people, Fr. Cashman is hopeful that people with holiday homes in the area will also subscribe.¹⁰⁴

Sherkin Fund Raising

On foot of this appeal, a banquet to fundraise for church repairs was held in the Sports Hall at Sherkin Island Marine Station on Saturday, July 22nd 1989. Over 200 people attended this banquet. The food was prepared by John Morrin, head chef at the Imperial Hotel in Cork city. Dr. Michael Murphy, Bishop of Cork and Ross, came early in the afternoon for the first banquet and mingled with the people as they arrived.

This banquet was so successful that it was decided to hold another the following year. This took place on Saturday 21st July, 1990. Again, over 200 people attended and the guest of honour Mr. Jack Lynch, former Taoiseach, received a standing ovation as he came into the hall accompanied by his wife Maureen.

Each of these banquets raised over 2,200 for the fund.¹⁰⁵

Below is a selection of photographs of the event. They show the arrival of Bishop Michael Murphy (right) being met by Mr. Matt Murphy and Philomena O’ Connell.

Fr. Owen Cashman gives a speech whilst two members of the band *Harmonix*, who provided the music, are in the background together with Deirdre Murphy-Youell (centre). The other

¹⁰⁴ *Southern Star*, 11th March, 1989. P.19.

¹⁰⁵ Matt Murphy, Sherkin Island Marine Station, Sherkin Island. Pers. Comm. (2018).

photos show the selection of food which was prepared by Chef John Morrin and the dancing. (Photos: courtesy of Matt Murphy, Sherkin Island Marine Station).



Fr. Sydney MacEwan's visit to Sherkin Island in 1971.



This photograph was taken outside St. Mona's Church, where a large group of islanders and visitors attended the Mass.

Bringing back memories

NOTED Scottish priest-tenor Very Rev. Canon Sidney MacEwan is pictured outside the Church of St. Mona on Sherkin Island during a visit which brought back memories for him.

For, in 1948, Canon MacEwan aided the island church when he sang at a number of concerts in Cork city to help pay a debt on its reconstruction.

SPECIAL

The Curate in Sherkin at the time was Fr. F. O'Flynn (left of picture), who is now Administrator at Kilmichael. Also in the group is Very Rev. P. O'Donovan, P.P., Rath and The Islands, and the islanders who attended a special Mass celebrated by Canon MacEwan. Centre is Mr. Philip Greene, the well-known musician whose composition "St. Patrick's Mass" had its premiere in Cork on Sunday last.

Cork Examiner, September 21st, 1971. P.18

Front Row L-R (Children): 1: Johnjoe O' Driscoll, 2: his sister Mona, 3: their brother Kevin, Farranacoush, Sherkin Island; 4: Susan Murphy, Sherkin Island Marine Station, Cloddagh, Sherkin Island; 5: Margaret O' Driscoll, Farranacoush, Sherkin Island; (the three boys partially hidden behind are): 6: Mike Murphy, Sherkin Island Marine Station, 7: his brother, Matty Murphy, Sherkin Island Marine Station and 8: Adrian O' Driscoll, Slievemore, Sherkin Island. 9: Pauline O' Driscoll, Cloddagh, Sherkin Island; 10: Martin O' Driscoll and 11; his twin brother, Jerry, Farranacoush, Sherkin Island; 12: Margo Dinan, Cork City and Sherkin Island¹⁰⁶; 13: her sister, Sandra and 14: her brother, Donal Dinan, Cork City and Sherkin Island.

Second Row R-L (Children contd.): 15: Kieran Dinan (brother of other Dinan children) Cork City and Sherkin Island¹⁰⁷; 16: Patricia O' Driscoll, Cloddagh, Sherkin Island; 17: partially hidden, Cormac O' Driscoll, Slievemore, Sherkin Island; 18: Dolly O' Reilly, Slievemore, Sherkin Island, her cousin, 19: Mairead O' Reilly, Farranacoush, Sherkin Island.

Adults: 2nd & 3rd Row L-R: 20: Mr Philip Green, Musician, Cork; 21: Fr. Sydney MacEwan, 22: Fr Paddy O' Donovan, local priest of Rath and the Islands of Cape and Sherkin; 23 (mostly hidden) possibly May O' Driscoll, Cloddagh, Sherkin Island; 24: Kitty O' Driscoll, Gneeves, Sherkin Island; 25: Anna O' Reilly (nee Regan), Farranacoush, Sherkin Island; 26: Fr. O' Flynn, curate on Sherkin in the 1940s; 27: Unidentified man. 28: Betty Norris, Farranacoush, Sherkin Island; 29: May O' Driscoll (nee Carew), Silver Strand Bungalow, Sherkin Island; 30: Helena O' Driscoll (nee O' Neill), farm behind Silver Strand Bungalow; 31: Unidentified woman; 32: Donal Dinan, Cork and Sherkin and 33: his wife, Peggy, parents of the Dinan children¹⁰⁸; 34: Partially hidden: Kathleen O' Driscoll (nee Daly) Cork city and Sherkin Island; 35: John O' Reilly, The Lane, Sherkin Island; 36: Mary Jacob (nee O' Neill), Schoolteacher, Sherkin Island; 37: Maureen O' Sullivan, The Jolly Roger pub, Farranacoush; 38: Vincent O' Driscoll, Cloddagh, Sherkin Island (later, Sherkin Island Ferries), Baltimore; 39: Jim (Rucksy) O' Sullivan, Slievemore, Sherkin Island; 40: Barry O' Driscoll, Cloddagh, Sherkin Island; 41: Jamesy O' Driscoll, Gneeves, Sherkin Island; 42: John Norris, Farranacoush, Sherkin Island; 43: Dinny McCarthy, Slievemore, Sherkin Island; 44: Mark O' Neill, Sherkin Island shop and P.O., 45: Unidentified woman; 46: Partially hidden, probably John 'Blondie' O' Driscoll, Slievemore, Sherkin Island; 47: Denis Nolan, Cloddagh, Sherkin Island; 48: Paul Dinan, Cork and Sherkin Island, brother of other Dinan Children; 49: Eileen Murphy, Sherkin Island Marine Station; 50: Pat 'Mikey' O' Driscoll, Cloddagh, Sherkin Island; 51: John 'the Guard' O' Driscoll, Silver Strand Bungalow, Sherkin Island; 52: Willie Norris, Farranacoush, Sherkin Island; 53: Unidentified man; 54: Willie O' Neill, Sherkin Island Shop and Post Office, Gneeves, Sherkin Island; 55: Mr. O' Driscoll, Baltimore Post Office, Baltimore; 56: Timmy Cahalane, formerly of Heir Island who moved to Sherkin Island; 57: Unidentified woman; 58: Nonie Cahalane, wife of Timmy Cahalane, Sherkin Island; 59: Vida Breen, Cork and Sherkin Island¹⁰⁹; 60: Matt Murphy, Sherkin Island Marine Station; 61: Unidentified man.

¹⁰⁶ Holidays on Sherkin

¹⁰⁷ Holidays on Sherkin

¹⁰⁸ Holidays on Sherkin

¹⁰⁹ Holidays on Sherkin

First Island Confirmations Since 1536

It was an historic day at Sherkin Island off the West Cork coast yesterday when the auxiliary Bishop of Cork and Ross, Most Rev. John Buckley, DD, administered the sacrament of confirmation there. The last time a similar ceremony took place on the island was 450 years ago. And the community on the island did not let the occasion go without showing their appreciation. Emblazoned on a large banner a short distance from St. Mona's Church where the ceremony took place were the words "Sherkin Island Welcomes Bishop Buckley". After he was conveyed to Sherkin on the ferry by Connie O' Driscoll he was met at the pier by Connie O' Reilly who welcomed him on behalf of the islanders.¹¹⁰



May 1st, 1986: Auxiliary Bishop of Cork and Ross, Most Rev. John Buckley, DD, being met on Sherkin Island pier by Connie O' Reilly, after arriving on the ferryboat *Miss Josephine*. Bishop Buckley was accompanied by Fr. Tim O' Donovan, Parish Priest of Rath and the Islands (also in photograph). They had travelled to the island to confirm two children, Krestine Havemann and Audrey Murphy. (Photo: Courtesy of Connie O' Reilly).

¹¹⁰ *Cork Examiner* Newspaper, May 1st, 1986. P. 18



LEFT: Auxiliary Bishop of Cork and Ross Most Rev. Dr. John Buckley with Audrey Murphy after the Confirmation ceremony on Sherkin Island. Included are Mr. Matt Murphy and other members of the family, Mark, Michael, Susan, Peter and Robbie.

Cork Examiner Newspaper, May 1st, 1986. P.18. (Photographs: Maurice O' Mahony).



Auxiliary Bishop of Cork and Ross Most Rev. Dr. John Buckley after Confirmation ceremony on Sherkin Island with Krestine Havemann and her parents Ulla and Claus.

Cork Examiner Newspaper, May 1st, 1986. P. 18. (Photographs: Maurice O' Mahony).

Practically the whole community of about 79 turned out to hear Bishop Buckley's sermon and to watch him administer the sacrament to two children, Audrey Murphy and Krestine Havemann. Bishop Buckley told the congregation that it was the first time a confirmation ceremony had taken place there since 1536. The following year – 1537 – the Franciscan Monastery had been destroyed by a war party of Waterford

men who had taken the action in retaliation for a similar raid on their homes some time previously. The monks were expelled but as the Bishop told our reporter afterwards, the whole attack had been misdirected as apparently the Waterford men had mistaken the monastery for the nearby O' Driscoll castle which is on the mainland a few short miles away overlooking Baltimore Harbour. In the course of his sermon he referred to the many activities that are now taking place on the island. He praised the great community spirit and the efforts of the island committee to integrate visitors into the life of the area. Bishop Buckley appealed to the people to preserve their tradition and heritage for it was "rich and good." He said "remember your ancestors' devotion to Mass and to prayer, in particular their love for the rosary which they referred to as the *Paidrin Pairteach* (shared prayers). The Mass was concelebrated by Very Rev. Tim O' Donovan, PP, Rath, Rev. Brendan O hUllaigh, CC Cape Clear, Rev. Liam Hickey, CC, Ballypahan, a native of Ballydehob and curate of Cape Clear for about seven years, together with Rev. Tom McCarthy, a Jesuit priest who left the island in 1936 to join the priesthood and who has been a regular visitor home since. During the ceremony the children's choir was led by Eileen O' Driscoll, Cape Clear who also provided the organ music. In attendance as well were Cape Clear teachers Cecelia O' Driscoll and Mary O' Driscoll. Subsequently, the whole congregation was invited by Fr. O' hUllaigh to the Community Hall where the Bishop mingled easily with his flock. At the hall, the Bishop met the teacher of the girls who had just been confirmed. Annette Walsh, from Skibbereen, currently has six pupils and happily pointed out that the trend was upwards rather than downwards. While there, Bishop Buckley was presented with a knitted jumper by Valerie Murphy on behalf of the community and before departing for the island he recited a decade of the rosary at the old Abbey near the pier for the deceased of Sherkin. Most of the island population turned out for the occasion and among these were Pat O' Driscoll, a 57-year old farmer from Farranacoush, who said that in his schooldays there were about 50 children going to school. He had reared a family of seven children on the island and had never regretted not having left the island. William Norris, a farmer (77) was also there and denied that he was the oldest man on the island referring me instead to Denis McCarty (81) who has acquired a reputation as a bone healer on Sherkin, and whose mother, who hailed from Ballydehob, was renowned for the same gift. His nephew is the legendary D. D. O' Driscoll from Baltimore who is also known to have the gift of bone setting. Bishop Buckley told us he had been reading up on his history before visiting the island, and understood that up to 1,200 people lived there up to the time of the famine.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Vivion Kilfeather, *Cork Examiner* Newspaper. May 1st, 1986, p. 18.

A group of people who attended the Confirmation



(Photo: Courtesy of Mary and Connie O' Reilly, Sherkin Island, Co. Cork).

Crowd Photo was at a party in the Community Hall, Sherkin Island after the Confirmation of Krestine Havemann (Denmark & Sherkin Island) and Audrey Murphy, Sherkin Island at St Mona's Church, Sherkin Island, 1986.

The People in the Photograph as follows:

Front Row: L-R: 3 small boys kneeling; 1: Sean O' Neill, Sherkin Island Shop/P.O.; 2: Neil Buggy and his brother, 3: Conaill Buggy, Farranacoush, Sherkin Island; (Standing) 4: Ronan Collins, The Lane, Sherkin Island; 5: Child unidentified (maybe John O' Driscoll, son of Corney and Mary O' Driscoll, Sherkin Island and Bantry). **Next Row: L-R:** seated: 6: Eleanor Phillips, Slievemore Sherkin Island & Malawi, Africa; 7: Denis McCarthy, Slievemore, Sherkin Island, 8: Bishop Michael Buckley, Cork and Ross Diocese; 9: William Norris, Farranacoush, Sherkin Island; 10: Eoghan Collins, The Lane, Sherkin Island; 11: unidentified man; 12: Fr. Tim O' Donovan, Rath and the Islands; 13: Tom Collins, Farranacoush, Sherkin Island.

Next Row L-R: 14: Mary 'Corney' O' Driscoll, Bantry; 15: May O' Driscoll, Cloddagh, Sherkin Island; 16: Jim O' Donnell holding his son, 17: Stephen, The Harbour Lights, Sherkin Island; 18: Mary 'Jerry' Crowley, Sherkin Island and Bandon; 19: Annette Walsh, Skibbereen, (Sherkin Island National School Teacher); 20: Paula Buggy, Farranacoush, Sherkin Island; 21: Anthony O' Reilly, Slievemore, Sherkin Island; 22: Pat Connie O' Driscoll, The Globes, Farranacoush, Sherkin Island; 23: Sue Cahalane (nee Cleary), Sherkin Island; 24: Krestine Havemann, Denmark and Sherkin Island; 25: Ulla Havemann, Denmark and Sherkin Island; 26: Nellie Collins, Farranacoush, Sherkin Island; 27: Claus Havemann (seated on wall) Denmark and Sherkin Island; 28: John Hunt (seated on wall) Sherkin Island; **Young people standing on wall: R-L:** 29: Mona O' Driscoll, her brother 30: Martin, her cousin 31: Annette O' Driscoll (Bantry) and Mona's sister, 32: Maria O' Driscoll, The Globes, Farranacoush, Sherkin Island; 33: Connie O' Reilly (with flat cap and tie), Slievemore, Sherkin Island.

Next Row: L-R: 34: Breda Collins (holding baby), The Lane, Sherkin Island; 35: Kathleen Sullivan (nee O' Driscoll) Slievemore, Sherkin Island and Baltimore, (partially hidden); 36: Josephine Smyth-O' Donnell, Roscommon and Sherkin Island; 37: Monica Stephens,

Horseshoe harbour and The Jolly Roger pub, Sherkin Island; 38: Margaret-Ann O' Neill (nee Nolan), Island House, Sherkin Island (pink blouse/glasses); 39: Geoff Stephens, Jolly Roger Pub holding his son 40: Michael; Matthew his younger son is hidden behind figure 38. 41: Pat O' Connor ('the Vets'), Millstreet and Sherkin Island (navy jacket/moustache); 42: Margaret O' Driscoll, Silver Strand, Sherkin Island, partially hidden; 43: Nuala Norris (face only visible); Farranacoush, Sherkin Island; 44: Valerie Murphy, Kerry and Cloddagh Sherkin Island; 45: Richard Collins, The Lane, Sherkin Island; 46: Mark O' Neill with his daughter 47: Marie on his shoulders, Sherkin Island shop/P.O., his wife, 48: Maureen O' Neill (nee McCarthy, short brown hair and glasses); 49: Kitty O' Driscoll, (Grey hair/pink scarf) Gneevies, Sherkin Island.

Back Row L-R 50: (Unidentified woman in yellow jacket with short black hair); 51: Britta Altmann, Sherkin Island and Germany; 52: William Fenwick, Farranacoush, Sherkin Island; 53: Mary O' Reilly (nee McCarthy) in pink knitted cap and pink coat, behind 54: Derek Thrower, England and his wife 55: Mary (nee O' Connor), O' Connor's pub, now The Jolly Roger, Sherkin Island; 56: Denis Nolan in flat cap, Cloddagh, Sherkin Island; 57: Tomas Glowatski holding his daughter 58: Lili on his shoulders, Sherkin Island and Germany. (Small brown and black dog in front is 'Spats', Sherkin Island Marine Station; other dog unidentified).

Benemerenti Award for Services to the Church.



Most Rev Dr John Buckley (right), Bishop of Cork and Ross, presenting the Bene Merenti medal to Mrs Mary O'Reilly in honour of her long service to St Mona's Church on Sherkin Island. Also included is Rev Fr Donal Cotter, Adm, Skibbereen. (Photo: Anne Minihane)

Papal medal for Sherkin sacristan

A SHERKIN islander has been honoured with a papal medal, which was presented to her by the Bishop of Cork and Ross.

Following a celebration of Mass on Sherkin Island Bishop John Buckley presented Mary O'Reilly, the sacristan on Sherkin Island, with the Bene Merenti Papal Medal for outstanding service to the church. Mary served in the St. Mona's Church (built in 1831) in Sherkin for 65 years, attending to the altar, grounds and linen. 'Her dedication,' Bishop Buck-

ley said, 'was total and absolute.' Mary's late husband, Connie, also assisted in tending to the church grounds when he was alive. Bishop Buckley said that Mary's work is a very important part of the Lay Apostolate, which is being emphasised so much today.

He said that there are many people like Mary involved in parishes throughout the Diocese working silently. 'Their work is essential, valuable and very much appreciated.'

Mass was concelebrated by

Fr Donal Cotter, the administrator of Skibbereen and Rath. Bishop Buckley also visited the old Franciscan Friary on the Island which was destroyed by Waterford seamen in 1537.

Bishop Buckley praised the islanders for their welcome to tourists during the summer season and highlighted the difficulties in living on an island and the extra costs involved in terms of education and transport. The case of islanders, he said, is one that must be supported in these times.



The Scroll and medal awarded to Mary O' Reilly for services to the church

On June 12th, 2011, Mary O' Reilly, was honoured with the Benemerenti Medal, for her long association of service to St. Mona's Church which started almost 57 years ago. Fr. O' Flynn who was resident priest on Sherkin from 1947-1954 established a rota of church cleaners and Mary began service to the church at that time. That service continued until her retirement in 2004.

Mary's husband, Connie was sacristan for many years until his death in 1998. Connie, who was a keen gardener, grew flowers, notably gladioli and hydrangeas, to ensure the availability of flowers for the altar here. Connie also acted as caretaker and cleaner, and together with Mary, they took care of the cleaning, repairs, altar linens, and other church duties for decades.

Connie's brother, John O' Reilly was also involved in church service and he took up the collections at mass until his death in 1976. After John's death his nephew Anthony O' Reilly (son of Mary and Connie), took over the collection/offertory duties.

After the Mass at 11 O' Clock in St. Mona's Church, a party was held at Sherkin Island National School where food and refreshments were served.

Sherkin Island Choir

Sherkin Island Choir was established about 30 years ago by Susan Murphy-Wickens, who continues to organise and run the choir today. In the early days, the group used to go around the island calling to each house to sing carols at Christmas time. Some of those who took part in the early days as very young children are now married with their own families.

The choir currently has a core group of the following members: Miriam Dunne, Dolly O' Reilly, Sue Cahalane, Linda O Beirne, Jackie Murphy, Robbie Murphy, Fr. Des O' Driscoll, Maria O' Driscoll, Mona O' Driscoll, Cally Harmer, Deirdre Murphy-Youell, Paddy Marshall, Brigid O' Connell and Jane Gleeson. Newcomers or those who wish to join on a temporary basis are always welcome.

It is under Susan's continuing leadership that the choir gives its annual Christmas Carol Service in St. Mona's Church, Sherkin Island. Depending on how dates fall, this service usually takes place on the last Sunday before Christmas Day. Candles light the windows, the Nativity Crib is placed on the altar; silver lights are draped over the fir tree and the altar is decorated with seasonal flowers and greenery. This service is always well-attended and often people will come into the island from the mainland for the service. Non-choir members also take part and do readings, songs, poems and play tunes as part of the service. In the early 2000s, Beka Thompson* who lived on Sherkin for several years co-led the choir with Susan (see below) until Beka moved to Tasmania.

As well as being a very important social part of Christmas on Sherkin, this service has raised thousands of pounds for charity over the last number of years despite the very small island population.



Donations welcome in aid of St Vincent de Paul

Ferries leaving Baltimore at 12.00 noon & 2.00 pm. Return ferry leaving Sherkin at 6.00 pm.

Notice in *Sherkin Newsletter* for the 2018 Carol Service.



Sherkin Choir Christmas Performance, 2018. Photograph courtesy of Terry Farnell.

From left, back row: Deirdre Murphy-Youell, Jackie Murphy, Dolly O' Reilly. Partially hidden, Bridget Madden and Miriam Dunne. Cally Harmer. Front Row from left: Mona O' Driscoll, Maria O' Driscoll, Paddy Marshall, Robbie Murphy, Sue Cahalane and Lilli Baumgart. (Absent: Linda O' Beirne).

Girls performing, from left: Eimear Murphy (daughter of Jackie Murphy) and Cait O'Driscoll (niece of Mona and Maria O' Driscoll).



Sherkin Choir Christmas Performance 2019. Photograph courtesy of Dylan Murphy.

From Left, back row: Cally Harmer, Jane Gleeson, Jackie Murphy, Dolly O Reilly, Bridget Madden, Miriam Dunne. Middle Row: Mona O' Driscoll, Maria O' Driscoll, Deirdre Murphy-Youell, Lilli Baumgart, Sue Cahalane and Choir Leader, Susan Murphy-Wickens.

Front Row: Fr. Des O' Driscoll, Joe Aston and Robbie Murphy. (Absent: Linda O' Beirne).

Beka Thompson* wrote the following piece about her time as co-leader of Sherkin Choir:

Arriving in October 2002 on Sherkin Island to work at the *Islanders Rest* Hotel I met my husband after just a few days and was proposed to just two weeks following. Before the wedding in February 2003, Susan Murphy Wickens discovered the fact that I could play piano and sing and put me to work as the 'Choir Mistress'. Her goal was to continue having Christmas Carols in the Church on Sherkin Island. Susan and I began to collaborate to bring together a group of fine Sherkin singers who soon became the "Sherkin Island Choir". We did accomplish our goal of continuing to have Christmas Carols in the local Church. The choir rehearsed every Tuesday and continued to grow in size from year to year. We would practice at the Islanders Rest Hotel and often have a beverage afterwards and socialise. 2007 was my final year with the choir. At this time we had a membership of approximately 30 singers, which on an Island of just 90 people was incredible. We also had several children performing songs and piano pieces. The church was packed with attendees. They had come to sing, support and watch their family and friends perform carols. I believe we achieved our goal of having every person on our beautiful Island come together. We celebrated and socialised afterwards at the pub.

I have since moved to Tasmania but have kept in touch with the fabulous Mrs Wickens, who continues to facilitate the Sherkin Island Choir and has never failed to keep achieving her goal of organising Christmas Carols in the church to bring the Sherkin Island community together every year. It was such a privilege to be part of her vision and choir and it inspired me to start a community choir here in Tasmania called the "Derwent Valley Choir". We are in our 13th year and have not only supported many carol events across the Valley but have been a part of nearly every community event this beautiful place holds; just as Susan would have done. To bring people together to sing is a beautiful thing. To contribute and support your community to come together is a beautiful thing. And without fail the people who are drawn to singing groups are beautiful too. So many fond memories and so glad those memories are continuing to be made on Sherkin Island.

(Beka Thompson, Derwent Valley, Tasmania, August, 2020)

Visiting Choirs

A Rare Treat in Sherkin Church – Cobh Choir sings Mass

The people who packed into the little church of St. Mona on Sherkin Island for the 11 a.m. Mass last Sunday week, were given a rare treat. Present to sing for them was a choir from the Secondary School of the Sisters of Mercy, Cobh. The music for the mass, Aifreann na Trocaire, was composed by Michael O' Ceallachain who, as a young man, taught in Skibbereen and went to Sherkin to accompany Fr. Sydney McEwan when that renowned tenor sang there many years ago. Those present on Sunday week were deeply moved as Micheal O Ceallachain's music beautifully expressed the call of the human heart for God's mercy and love.

In his homily, Fr. Cormac Breathnach, S.M.A., of the diocese of Illorin, Nigeria, whose home is on Sherkin recalled that the contact of the Sisters of Mercy with the islands

of Carbery was significant in terms of mericul (cannot make out this word; perhaps it should read 'medical') service. In 1879, following the outbreak of a double epidemic of German measles and typhus on Cape Clear Island, the Sisters of Mercy from Skibbereen travelled each day to that island from October 8 to December 12. On Cape the Sisters set up a clinic and visited and nursed the sick in their homes. Again, in 1886, following a request from the then Bishop of Ross, Dr. William Fitzgerald, four Sisters of Mercy from Skibbereen community went to Hare Island to care for the people there during an epidemic of typhus. Two of these Sisters caught the fever and one of them died. Fr. Cormac asserted that these nineteenth century nuns represented what was best within Irish Christianity, generosity, kindness and apostolic courage. It was up to us in our time to manifest these same virtues in our responses to the needs of our neighbours. 1886 was just four years after the death of Karl Marx, and one year after a Mr. Benz began to produce engines for automobiles. Fr. Cormac said the Skibbereen Sisters of Mercy in their day demonstrated what we now know to be emphatically true; that science, political and economic theory, and technology cannot, by themselves, bring peace, indeed they are often sadly used in the service of destruction and division. Only the love of God, based on a personal response to Christ, can provide the foundation for a lasting peace.

Concelebrating with Fr. Cormac were Canon Donal O' Briain, former Parish Priest of Newcastle West, and one-time President of St. Munchin's College, Limerick, and Fr. Des O' Driscoll, of St. John the Baptist Parish, Rochdale, in the diocese of Salford, England. Fr. Des's own father, William O' Driscoll, who was also present, comes from Sherkin Island.

The choir was organised by Sr. Marcella and conducted by Sr. Epcharia. The organist was Sr. Aquin and the soloist was Miss Alice O' Connell. Also present were Sisters Brid, Bernadette and Mary, Siobhan, de Lourdes, Madelene and Catherine, all from the diocese of Cloyne. The lessons were read by Miss Karen O' Reilly and Jim Mountjoy, and the offerings were brought to the altar by Patrick M. O' Driscoll and Connie O' Reilly, both of Sherkin.

In thanking the choir for so generously undertaking the long journey to Sherkin Island, Fr. Cormac asked for prayers for the rapid recovery of Micheal O' Ceallachain who is presently in the Regional Hospital, Cork.¹¹² When the priest pointed out that the composer's wife, Maeve, and his daughter, Eileen, were present, the heartfelt applause that rang out expressed the gratitude and appreciation of the congregation for the work of this marvellous musician. 'It was the first time,' a wide-eyed altar-boy said, 'that I heard clapping in Church.'

***Southern Star* September 4th, 1982. P. 9**

Fr. Cormac Breathnach was ordained in December, 1965 and celebrated Mass on Sherkin Island two days later (see below). His father, Professor Riobáird Breathnach (1913- 1975) was Professor of Old and Middle English in University College, Cork, from 1967 until his retirement in 1972. The Breathnach family had been coming to Sherkin Island for holidays since the 1940s and eventually bought a house on the island which the family continues to use as a holiday home.

¹¹² Now Cork University Hospital, Wilton, Cork.

Monkstown Chamber Choir – Visits to Sherkin

Monkstown Chamber Choir have been coming to Sherkin for the last ten years, enjoying our annual West Cork trip. We sing at the 4pm Saturday afternoon Mass in St Mona's Church, where the congregation always make us so welcome.

The choir are a Christian community choir led by organist and choirmaster Roger Ellis. We sing regularly for monthly Choral Evensong in St John's Church, Monkstown in County Cork but also at other events around the Harbour.

Roger's great-grandmother, Mary Young, was born in 1857 on Sherkin Island at The Garrison, where the hotel is now located. Her sister, Annie, ran the local post office close by. Mary and Annie's brother, Nicholas (1858 – 1907) is buried at Tullagh old cemetery in Baltimore. Their parents were William and Jane (nee Evans).

John Norris told me of a little poem that Annie Young wrote about the future of The Garrison when Nicholas was looking for a wife:-

***"Tis my father he's mounting the canon;
To destruction he fears it will fate.
If Hutchinson, Trinder or Shannon
Shall enter The Garrison gate.
...And Trinder got there!"***

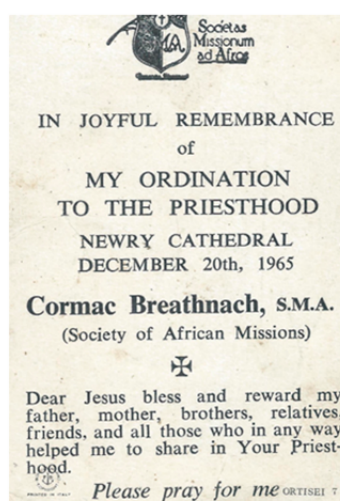
Nicholas's wife was Mary (Minnie) nee Trinder. The canon referred to was on the grounds of The Garrison, and is now somewhere in Baltimore I believe. Nicholas (Snr) and Mary had three children – Edward, Nicholas (Jnr) and Elizabeth. Edward moved to the White House on the mainland and ended up living at Cramers Court near Kinsale.

Roger's family history led the choir to make their annual trip to Sherkin. We always enjoy the wonderful welcome from the Sherkin community and especially from the Murphy family. And our visit wouldn't be the same without Matt Murphy's apple pie!!

Roger Ellis, Choirmaster, Monkstown Choir. October 2nd, 2020.



Newly ordained Fr. Cormac Breathnach celebrating mass in St. Mona's church, Sherkin Island. Kneeling are Connie O' Reilly and his children Margaret and Anthony. Behind from Left: Mary O' Neill (nee Fenwick), Willie Norris and Lily Roche (nee McCarthy). Right: women kneeling at altar rails unidentified. Note the former Stations of the Cross; also the altar rails which were removed during renovations in late 1970s. The photograph was taken on December 22nd, 1965.



Church Interior, Furnishings and Fittings



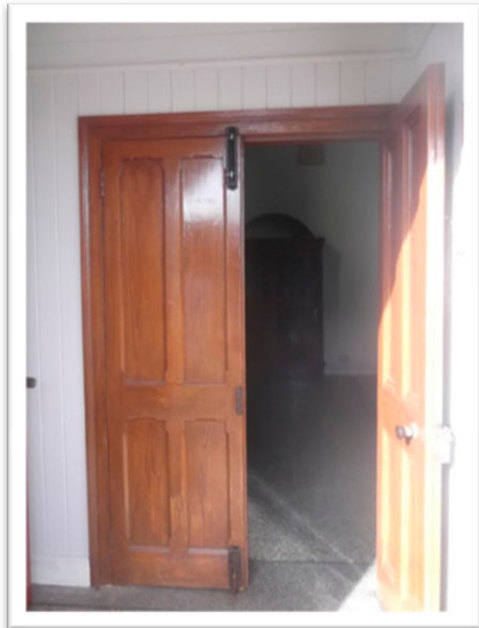
N/S Wrought Iron Church Gates



South facing Church Door.

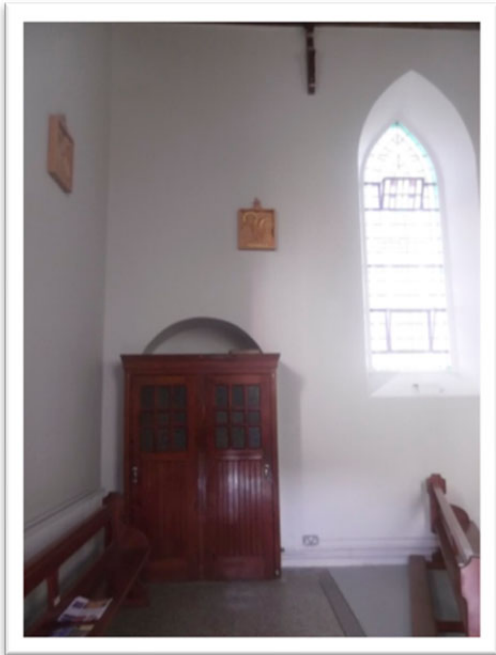


Granite Holy Water Stoup in Porch.¹¹³

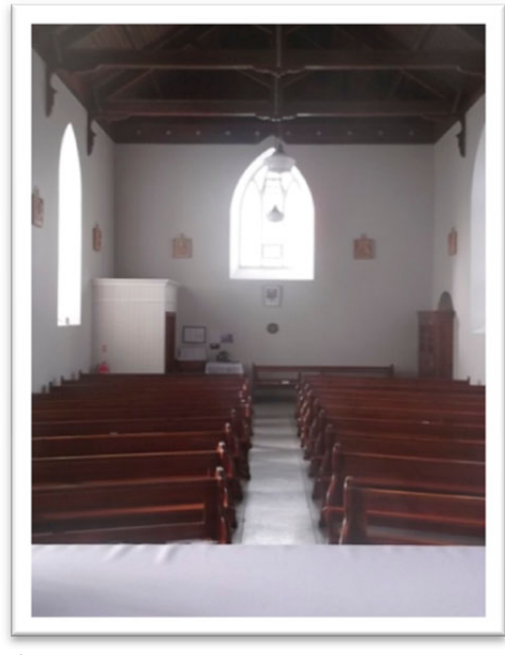


S/N – Interior Porch Doors

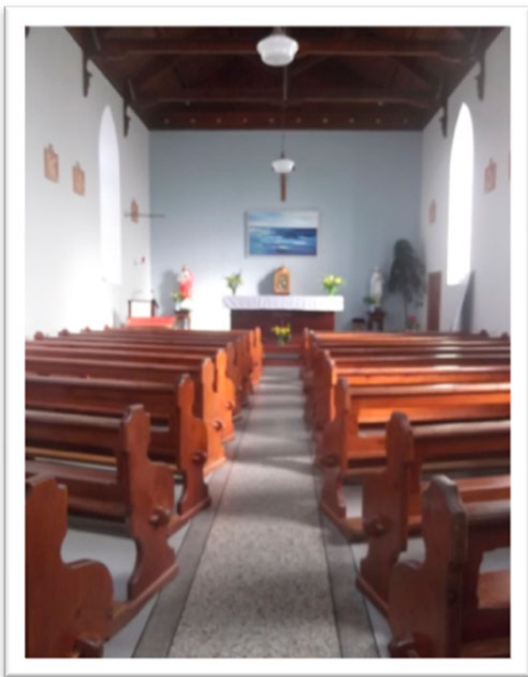
¹¹³ An entry in an old accounts book refers to a Holy Water stoup being installed at a cost of eight shillings. It is uncertain if this is the same one or if this one was installed during the refurbishments in the late 1940s, which I think is more likely as it seems relatively new.



S/N Confession Box: Note niche on wall behind box which was installed during building to give option of opening a second door if required.¹¹⁴



E/W – Looking towards the back of the church from the altar (Note: interior wooden porch probably added during renovations in the 1940s).

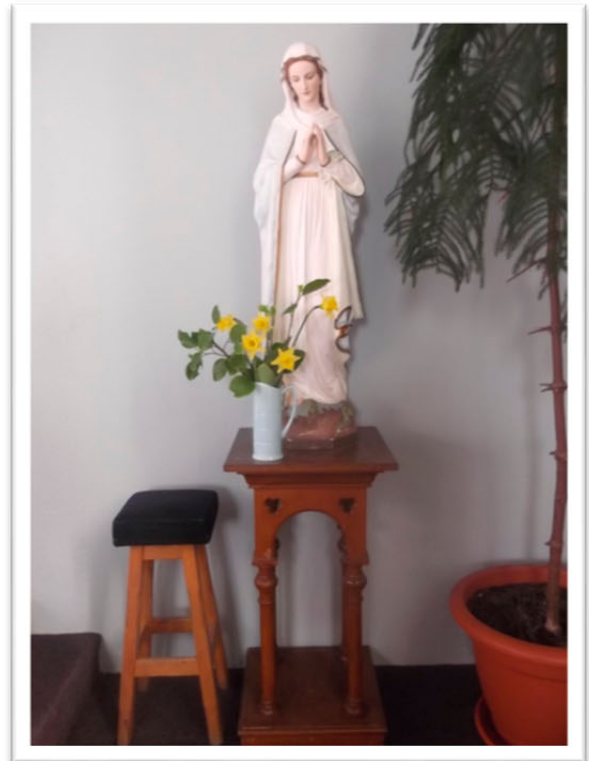


W/E – Interior looking towards the altar from back of church.



W/E – The altar flanked by the statues of The Sacred Heart and Blessed Virgin Mary which were donated by Florence O' Neill, Island House, Sherkin Island. Ca., 1950s.

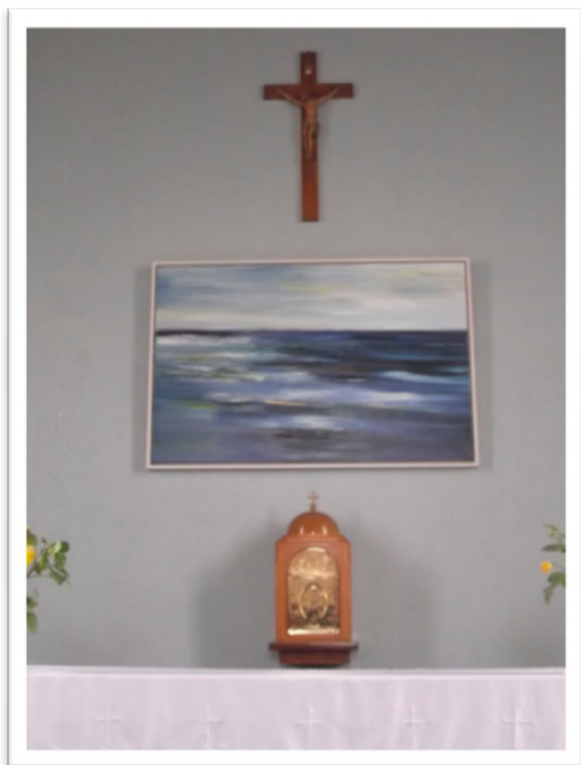
¹¹⁴ Sean O' Neill, Island House, Sherkin Island, Pers. Comm. (2018).



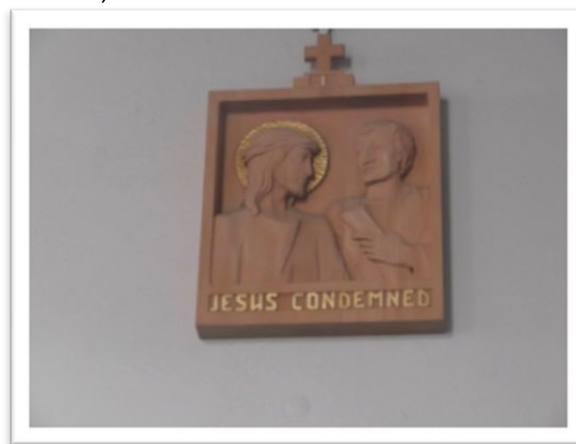
Above - statue of The Sacred Heart with detail of face.



Above - statue of Our lady with detail of face.



Left - The crucifix, oil painting and tabernacle behind the altar. The oil painting was donated by local artist, Majella O' Neill-Collins to commemorate a young man, Aidan Burke, from Millstreet, who died at sea in 1998.



Above - The First Station of the Cross.



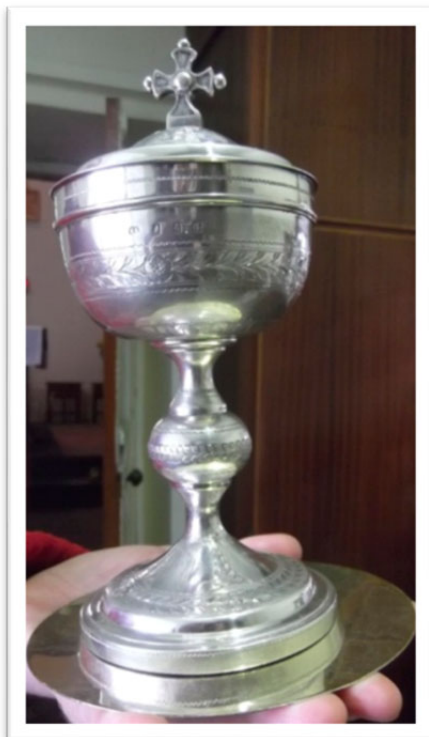
Above - Silver Pyx

A pyx is a small box used to carry the consecrated host to the sick or those otherwise unable to come to a church to receive Holy Communion. This silver pyx has the Greek letters IHS engraved on the cover. IHS is an ancient monogram formed from the first three letters —Iota, Eta and Sigma—of the Greek word for Jesus: IHSOUS.



Above - Chalice - A chalice or goblet is a footed cup intended to hold a drink. In religious practice, a chalice is often used for drinking during a ceremony.

This chalice is engraved with designs from the Book of Kells. The bottom bears the inscription: "*Presented to the Rev. T. Maher, C.C., by the people of Sherkin on his departure from amongst them as a little token of their appreciation of his priestly virtues 1918*"



Above – The silver ciborium. This vessel is used for holding the Eucharist.



Above - The brass Paten. The use of patens during Holy Communion are two-fold: 1. First the patens are used to catch the Sacred Host that may inadvertently drop during distribution. 2. The second purpose is to catch particles that may fall from the Sacred Host during Communion.¹¹⁵



The silver marks which are stamped near the rim of the ciborium.



Above - The thurible is a metal censer suspended from chains, in which incense is burned during worship services.

¹¹⁵ <http://www.tldm.org/news4/patens.htm>
[Retrieved: 2018/02/21].



Above and Right - The Monstrance is a sacred vessel designed to expose the consecrated Host to the congregation either for adoration in church or for carrying in procession, particularly on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ.¹¹⁶



Above – A silver Pyx also engraved with the letters IHS on the cover.



Above - The incense boat and spoon. The incense is taken from this vessel and put into the thurible or censer during worship. The smoke from the thurible is interpreted by both the Western Catholic and Eastern Christian churches as a symbol of the prayer of the faithful rising to heaven.¹¹⁷

Photos: courtesy of Mona O' Driscoll, Sherkin Island, 2018.

¹¹⁶http://www.catholicdeacon.org/mass_objects.htm [Accessed: 2018/02/21].

¹¹⁷https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_use_of_incense.

Pew Plaques in Sherkin Church, February 12th, 2018

MR & MRS J O'CONNOR

FATHER SYDNEY MAC EWAN
OUTSTANDING BENEFACTOR

MRS M O'REILLY
&
FAMILY

STEVE NOLAN

MR & MRS N. MCCARTHY
& FAMILY
MR & MRS W. O'NEILL & FAMILY
&
W. FENWICK

MR & MRS J. CLANCY
&
FAMILY
DONORS OF CARPET

MRS D. W. O'DRISCOLL
&
FAMILY

MR & MRS H. DENNIS
DUBLIN
GENEROUS BENEFACTORS

MR & MRS C. O'DRISCOLL
&
FAMILY

MR & MRS JAMES O'DRISCOLL
& FAMILY
&
PATRICK O'DRISCOLL

MR & MRS T. COLLINS & FAMILY
&
JOHN HARTE

MR & MRS F. O'NEILL & FAMILY
&
MARIA O'NEILL

Please Remember in Your Prayers
My Friend MAUREEN WALSH (Nee Collins)
R.I.P.

MARIA, NORA
&
JOHNNIE O'DRISCOLL

MRS ELIZA NOLAN
& FAMILY
MR & MRS GEO. NORRIS
& FAMILY
T. O'BRIEN, NEW YORK

MR & MRS MACON O'DRISCOLL
&
MR & MRS PAT WALSH
DONORS OF FLOOR

LOUIS NOLAN

• WILLIE & EILEEN O'DONOVAN •

MRS DAISY O'DRISCOLL
& FAMILY
&
MR & MRS MIKEY O'DRISCOLL
& FAMILY

TOM CURTIN, CORK
DONOR OF WEST WINDOW
&
TERRAZZO
GENEROUS BENEFACTOR

• DENIS NOLAN & FAMILY •

MR & MRS W. NORRIS
&
FAMILY

MR & MRS PADDY O'DRISCOLL
& FAMILY
&
BATT ROCHE

MR & MRS D. O'REGAN
&
FAMILY

3 SEATS
PRESENTED BY
OTHER PARISHIONERS
OF
SHERKIN ISLAND

Church Garden



(Photo: courtesy of Mona O' Driscoll, Sherkin Island, 2018).



(Photo: courtesy of Mona O' Driscoll, Sherkin Island, 2018).

The Grotto

Fr. Owen Cashman, who was Parish Priest of Rath and the Islands from 1987 until his death in 1999, was determined to have a Grotto on Sherkin Island. His sister Peg, who was a Presentation nun, told him of a statue in Millstreet in the Presentation Convent there. The convent was being sold and they wanted a home for the statue of Our Lady at their grotto. Fr. Cashman was terminally ill at the time and it seems like God had given him extra strength to go and look at the statues. Along with Sr. Peg and Matt Murphy, he headed off for Millstreet and when he got there, was shown two statues - neither of which he liked. However, his face lit up when he was shown the grotto at the end of a long garden, with its beautiful face of Our Lady. That was the one he wanted to take back to Sherkin. Sadly, within days Fr. Cashman was back in hospital but it was a great consolation to him that before he died the statues were collected and brought back to Sherkin. The Grotto would have been put in place in 1999/2000.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Matt Murphy, Sherkin Island Marine Station, Sherkin Island, Co. Cork. Pers. Comm. (2018).

Interestingly, Fr. Cashman's early days in this parish saw him unwittingly caught-up in a local disagreement involving his predecessor Fr. Tim O' Donovan:

Rebel priest who defied bishop's authority laid to rest

Tuesday, July 03, 2007

By Eoin English

A REBEL cleric who openly defied a bishop's authority was buried yesterday.

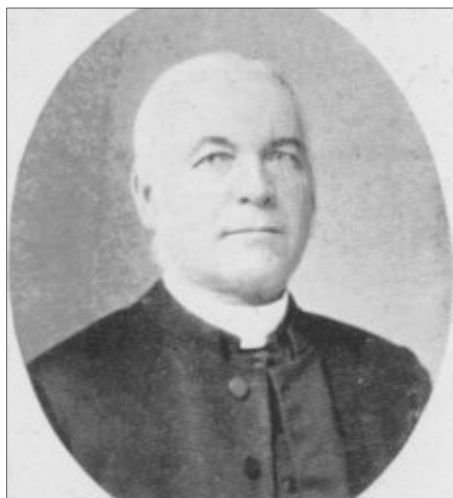
Fr Tim O'Donovan died on Friday in the care of the sisters and staff of St Paul's Nursing Home in Bushmount, Clonakilty, in West Cork. He was 92. Bishop of Cork and Ross Dr. John Buckley described him during his funeral Mass in St Michael's Church in Rathbarry as a holy priest who was very aware of the purpose of his priesthood. "He served the people well in the different parishes where he ministered," he said. "He was extremely proud of his diocese and found it difficult to accept decisions that were made regarding its future. "Like Saint Paul, who differed with Saint Peter, Fr. Tim did not hesitate to challenge the authorities of that time," but he said the difficulties were resolved in a friendly way.

Fr. O'Donovan, who was parish priest of Rath and the Islands in the late '80s, grabbed national attention when he openly refused to acknowledge the authority of the late Bishop Michael Murphy over Ross. He refused to acknowledge the diocesan authorities, because he did not recognise the merger of the Cork and Ross diocese in 1958. Bishop Murphy sacked him from his ministry on October 10, 1987. It sparked a bitter row which split the parish for a decade. In the days after Fr O'Donovan's sacking, more than 100 of his supporters locked the doors of the Church of the Sacred Heart at Rath, near Baltimore, for almost two weeks. They successfully prevented his replacement Fr. Owen Cashman, who has since died, from entering the church. Bishop Murphy later pleaded with Fr O'Donovan from the altar of the Pro-Cathedral in Skibbereen to end the row. Despite a statement from the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Gaetano Alibrandi, which confirmed that His Holiness Pope Paul VI had on April 1, 1976, named Bishop Murphy as coadjutor bishop with rights of succession to the Diocese of Cork and Ross, Fr. O'Donovan remained defiant. The stand-off ended in the High Court later that month when Bishop Murphy sought an injunction against Fr. O'Donovan to restrain him from holding himself out to be the parish priest of Rath and the Islands. Fr. O'Donovan went on to celebrate Mass in a number of local homes. Bishop Murphy's successor Bishop Buckley moved to heal the rift in 1998 when Fr. O'Donovan was 83, reinstating him to the ministry and clearing the way for him to celebrate the sacraments as a retired priest.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ <https://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/rebel-priest-who-defied-bishops-authority-laid-to-rest-36282.html>
[Accessed: 2018/05/17].

Two Notable Priests Associated with Sherkin

Fr. Charles Davis



Source: Google Images (Accessed: 22/01/2021)

Perhaps the most famous priest who was parish priest of Rath and the Islands in the latter half of the nineteenth century was Fr. Charles Davis. Born in Clonakilty in 1826, Fr. Davis attended the Irish College in Paris and St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. After various appointments in West Cork, he was Parish Priest of Rath and the Islands from 1878 until his death in 1892.¹²⁰ At that time, the region was still suffering from the effects of the 1842 potato famine. The majority of people existed at subsistence level and although fish were plentiful they were being harvested by foreign boats because the local population had none of the resources necessary to exploit the fish stocks or compete with outside fleets. The potato crop was still the staple diet but there were a succession of failed harvests and people were on the verge of starvation. The situation continued to worsen and by 1880, financial aid was received from the Canadian and British Governments to the tune of £65,000 with a view to developing the fishing industry which would complement the agricultural output of the area.¹²¹ The natural advantages of Baltimore Harbour were not reflected ashore where the infrastructure necessary for a successful fishing industry did not exist.¹²² This situation changed with the appointment of Fr. Davis as Parish Priest in 1878. He was familiar with the area from an earlier posting as pastor of Cape Clear and Sherkin Island from 1854-1858. Fr. Davis was a member of the Davis-Wolfe family of Protestant and Catholic background and he had connections in both communities. One of these was a doctor, a cousin of the Townsends who worked in Buckingham Palace. Through him, Fr. Davis was able to apply to Queen Victoria for financial aid to revitalise the local fishing industry. He travelled to Buckingham Palace with a group of fishermen from Cape Clear and had an audience with the queen. The fishermen told her that: *'There are oceans of fish knocking at our doors, but we haven't as much as a bucket to take them out of the waters.'*

¹²⁰ Revd. Dr. Tom Deenihan, Pers. Comm. (February 14th, 2011)

¹²¹ Seamus Fitzgerald, *Mackerel and the Making of Baltimore, Co. Cork. 1879-1913*, (Irish Academic Press, 1999), p. 12.

¹²² Ibid. P. 26.

The queen put Fr. Davis in touch with Baroness Angela Burdett Coutts, her banker. Fr Davis explained to Baroness Coutts how a valuable source of income and employment was being lost through lack of funds. When any money was available it was used to pay rent to the landlords. The local currachs were not able to compete with the foreign fishing vessels. Subsequently, a correspondence ensued between Fr. Davis and Baroness Coutts and he described the type of boat best suited to the fishermen's needs. This was a boat from the Isle of Man which cost four-hundred pounds, was capable of carrying thirty tons of cargo and a crew of eight. Fr Davis himself had spent two years on the Isle of Man learning the techniques of boatbuilding and net making so had first-hand knowledge of the industry. Baroness Coutts finally agreed to make a loan of £10,000 towards the building of a fishing fleet for Baltimore.¹²³

This financial security meant that the fishermen of Cape Clear and Baltimore soon had their own fishing boats which were equal to those of the Island of Man and Scotland. Before the money was made available, there was not a single boat of that class owned in the parish, but now, the island of Cape Clear, which had a population of 600, had a fleet of eighteen boats, each manned by a crew of eight. The entire number of boats in the parish was over sixty and the loan had been paid back to the last farthing.¹²⁴

Extract from the Obituary of Fr. Charles Davis, Southern Star Newspaper, October 29th, 1892. P. 7:

*He had secured the erection of a pier at Baltimore which was much needed; a dangerous rock in the harbour is marked by a buoy, and a lighthouse has been erected at the entrance to the harbour, and has proved of much advantage to navigation generally. Through his exertions a splendid fishing school has been established at Baltimore, towards the cost of which the government, through Mr. Balfour, gave a grant of £5,500. The institution which has over one hundred pupils is an object of great interest to strangers and is, in the summer especially, constantly visited by tourists who invariably express their warmest admiration for the manner in which it is conducted and the greatest sympathy for the ends it is designed to attain. As a result of all these labours, Baltimore has become, in a certain sense the headquarters of the mackerel fishing on the south coast of Ireland. English and Scotch fish buyers have established curing stations there and in the fishing season it is a busy centre. Well know Liverpool merchants on hearing of Fr. Davis's illness a few days ago, spoke in the very highest terms of the worth and character of the deceased clergyman. One serious drawback of the place was the difficulty of getting the fish rapidly to the markets owing to the absence of railway communication. When Mr. Balfour's scheme for railways for the congested districts in Ireland was announced, Fr. Davis saw his chance and it is mainly through his efforts that the railway to Baltimore which was to be opened by Baroness Burdett Coutts at the end of this month has been accomplished. These are some of the good works of this energetic Irish priest, who, if he had been spared, had other schemes in contemplation for further extending the beneficent institutions of which he laid the foundations.*¹²⁵

¹²³ Alfred O' Mahony, *Baltimore: A Perspective*, Boole Library, Special Collections, University College, Cork, (MP 941.956 BALT)

¹²⁴ *Southern Star* newspaper, October 29th, 1892. P. 7.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Fr Davis died on 13th October, 1892 at the Parochial House in Rath. He is buried in the grounds of the Sacred Heart Church, Rath and his grave is marked by a large, Celtic cross. This cross originally stood in the grounds of the Baltimore Fisheries/Industrial School.¹²⁶ The site where the school stood was developed into a hotel in the 1960s (*The Gulf Stream Hotel*). It changed ownership and underwent renovations several times over the years and is currently the location of Baltimore Community Leisure Centre and Swimming Pool.

Fr. Edward Lambe

Fr. Lambe was born in Co. Tipperary in 1891. He was ordained for Ross Diocese in Skibbereen in 1917 and spent the next two years serving on Sherkin Island. After a number of other appointments on the mainland, he returned again to Sherkin where he served from 1938-1947. Between 1951-1962 he served as Parish Priest of Rath and the Islands.¹²⁷

Fr. Lambe is still remembered on the island by some of the older residents. He, together with Fr. James Coombes, officiated at the wedding of Mary and Connie O' Reilly on Sherkin Island in 1958.



Wedding of Connie and Mary O' Reilly St. Mona's Church, Sherkin Island. September 16th, 1958. L-R: Kitty O' Driscoll, Fr. James Coombes, Mary O' Reilly (nee McCarthy), Fr. Edward Lambe, Connie O' Reilly and John O' Reilly.

¹²⁶ Alfred O' Mahoney, Pers. Comm. (19/03/2011).

¹²⁷ Áine Ní Chonaill, *The Colourful Father Ned Lambe* in Rosscarbery Past and Present, Vol. 15, (Rosscarbery and District History Society, December 2013), pp.54-74.

During his time on Sherkin, Fr. Lambe, who was a very sociable person, often had the locals at his house for card-playing, story-telling and socialising. The presbytery had the reputation of being haunted and when the neighbours were visiting at night to card-play, Fr. Lambe would place a school-boy on the roof to drop items down the chimney and frighten the guests; these noises were, of course, blamed on the ghost! Whether or not this particular story is true is uncertain but it is another of the tales about Fr. Lambe that are still remembered today.¹²⁸ Fr. Lambe made raised beds in the garden adjoining the presbytery on Sherkin and the local school children were roped-in to help with weeding and looking after the vegetables.¹²⁹ From time to time there would be “wreck” washed up on the Sherkin coast. This should be taken in hand by the coastguard. The story is told of a life-raft being washed up in Horseshoe Harbour. These rafts had lockers which contained survival kits. When the coastguard arrived, Father Lambe was on board the raft, wielding an axe. He had smashed open the lockers and the locals were ferrying the contents up to his house, for later distribution. “You can take the rest away to Baltimore, now”, said Lambe.¹³⁰ On another occasion, Fr. Lambe spotted Jack Lynch and his wife Maureen, sunbathing on a beach on Sherkin. Taking advantage of the moment, Fr. Lambe approached the couple and while Mrs. Lynch scrambled for her towel on Jack’s orders, Fr. Lambe greeting them with “You’re Jack Lynch? We need an extension here to the pier. Come on with me, till I show you”. And that was the end of Jack’s sun-bathing.¹³¹

Two fellow priests from his native Tipperary spent several holidays on Sherkin with Fr. Lambe who looked forward, with great pleasure, to their visits and described them as follows: “Sherkin was stark and inhospitable, but its curate, Father Ned, had a heart like a blazing turf bonfire and was the soul of hospitality. A little white-washed presbytery on the lonely island off the Cork coast was fused with a little white-washed chapel. Billows of forlorn, tobacco-brown boglands flecked with golden furze swelled all around; the wild sea in from the very ends of the earth battered against cliffs and broke on long strands. Because of the complete absence of trees and cover, there were wide views on all sides: far away white cottages glinted from the mainland by day and the lights of Baltimore, the ‘capital’ of the parish, twinkled at night. Sherkin was a paradise of big views, clean air and peace.”¹³²

“While they were out, revelling in timeless freedom, Father Ned would be slaving in his rough garden. Clad in a high-necked fisherman’s jersey and wearing a black beret, he heaved out huge stones from a plot of land he was reclaiming, or moulded beds of potatoes with his hands, believing that was a far better method than with the spade. When meal time approached, he would clean up and bake a cake of bread, prepare eggs and fish, grind the coffee beans. After the sumptuous supper, they would play cards, or talk. Father Ned excelled in talk – grand, idea-crowded talk. Sometimes the visitors took themselves off for a bout of silent companionship. If it was wet, they made for an old, stone-built hen house commanding a giant’s view of inlets, islands and headlands; here they sat side by side

¹²⁸ Sean O’ Neill, Island House, Sherkin Island. Pers Comm. (April, 2018).

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Áine Ní Chonaill, *The Colourful Father Ned Lambe* in Rosscarbery Past and Present, Vol. 15, (Rosscarbery and District History Society, December 2013), pp.54-74.

¹³¹ Ibid. P. 62.

¹³² Ibid. Pp. 66, 67.

(barely fitting at that) staring, smoking and silent. They had wonderful holidays in Sherkin.¹³³

Fr. Lambe loved snuff and sometimes used it even during Confirmation ceremonies when he sat to the side of the altar and could be heard snorting.¹³⁴ Once, at a station in Slievemore on Sherkin, Father Coombes, his curate at the time, was saying Mass. Father Lambe was in another room and would join them at a later stage for the station offerings. John Norris was a young altar-boy at the station. Father Coombes said to the woman of the house, "When I am finished I'll go around and bless the house. Let you open the door a crack." As Father Coombes went round, John heard this awful howling noise. In his youthful innocence he thought that this was the Devil exiting through the open door on foot of the blessing. It was only afterwards when Father Lambe had joined them and the sound was repeated that he realized it had been Father Lambe and his snuff-taking.¹³⁵

Fr. Lambe died in 1973 in Watergrass Hill, Co. Cork, his last parish, where he had served from 1962-73. His grave is in the church grounds there.¹³⁶

Fr. Lambe's mother died while staying with him on Sherkin Island in 1946. Her obituary appeared in the local newspaper at that time:

The death occurred on January 15th at the residence of her son, Rev. Edward J. Lambe, of Mrs. Alice Lambe, N.T. Wife of the late Mr. James Lambe, N.T., she was from Hollyford, Co. Tipperary, and for several years after retiring from teaching she and her husband lived at Courtmacsherry. A woman of great personal charm she was held in high esteem by all who knew her. She had reached the age of eighty-five but despite her years retained that keenness of intellect and perceptiveness which distinguished her in her profession. Solemn Requiem High Mass was offered in Sherkin Island Church after which the funeral took place to Myross graveyard. The celebrant of the Mass was Rev. J. Lambe, son, the deacon being Rev. J. Lambe, nephew and the sub-deacon, Rev. E. J. Lambe, son. Rev. J. McCarthy, B.D., manager, Baltimore Fisheries School was master of ceremonies. Most Rev. Dr. Moynihan, Bishop of Ross, officiated at the graveside, all the priests of the diocese being present as well as Right Rev., Monsignor McCarthy. S.M.A., Rev. Bartholomew Keohane. S.M.A. and Rev. Denis Minihane. S.M.A. There was also a big gathering of people representative of the several phases of life in the district. The chief mourners included Rev. Edward J. Lambe, C.C., Sherkin Island. Rev. John J. Lambe, diocese of Reno, Nevada, U.S.A., Dr. C. J. Lambe, Military Staff College, Stoke-on-Trent, Mr. L. J. Lambe, 3, Hollyhill, Hampstead, London. Mr. P. J. Lambe, 6,121, Coleman Avenue, Dearborn, Michigan, U.S.A. Rev. Sister Mary Winifred, O. P., Dominican Priory, Stoke-on-Trent, and Mrs. Stevenson, 57, Comiston, Edinburgh.

Southern Star Newspaper, February 2nd, 1946. P.4

¹³³ Ibid. Pp. 67, 68.

¹³⁴ Ibid. P. 70.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid. P. 73.

Some of the Priests associated with Sherkin Island in earlier years

Burns, Rev. Patrick J. CC

Date of Ordination: 23/6/1929

Sherkin Island CC : 1929 – 1931

He was adopted (pro-tem) from the Diocese of Clogher. He returned to his Diocese on the completion of his appointment in Sherkin Island.

Last Known Appointment: Rath and the Islands.

Cashman, Very Rev. Owen PP

Date of Ordination: 22/6/1958

Last Known Appointment: Rath and the Islands

Collins, Very Rev. Daniel PP

Date of Ordination: 1858

Last Known Appointment: Rath and the Islands

Coombes, Very Rev. James (Jim) PE

Date of Ordination: 19/6/1949

Last Known Appointment: Timoleague

Sherkin Island CC: 1956 – 21/5/1961

Daly, Very Rev. John PP

Last Known Appointment:

Rath and the Islands PP: 07/1914 – 12/8/1918

Davis, Very Rev. Charles PP

Date of Ordination: 1854

Last Known Appointment: Rath and the Islands

Cape Clear/Sherkin Island C.C. : 1854 – 1858

Rath and the Islands PP: 03/1878 – 13/10/1892

Holland, Very Rev. William J. PP

Date of Ordination: 13/6/1902

Last Known Appointment: Ardfield / Rathbarry

Sherkin Island CC : 09/1912 – 1913

Rath and the Islands PP: 06/1929 – 1936

Kearney, Very Rev. Thomas PP

Date of Ordination: 1880

Last Known Appointment: Kilmeen & Castleventry

Sherkin Island CC: 1882 – 05/1884

Keohane, Very Rev. Canon Gerald

Date of Ordination: 20/6/1954

Sherkin Island CC: 12/4/1961 – 24/3/1962

Lambe, Very Rev. Edward J. (Ned) PP

Date of Ordination: 30/9/1917

Last Known Appointment: Watergrasshill / Glenville

Sherkin Island CC : 1917 – 1919; 1938-47;

Rath and the Islands PP: 1951 – 23/3/1962

Leader, Very Rev. Henry PP VG

Rath and the Islands PP : 1851 – 1863

Last Known Appointment: Clonakilty

Lannon, Rev. Francis CC

Date of Ordination: 21/6/1914

Sherkin Island CC : 1916 – 1917

Last Known Appointment: Rath and the Islands

Lucey, Very Rev. John PP

Date of Ordination: 1878

Last Known Appointment: Rath and the Islands

Rath and the Islands PP : 1907 –

10/6/1914

Lucey, Very Rev. Jeremiah PP VF

Date of Ordination: 1858

Last Known Appointment: Clonakilty

Cape Clear/Sherkin Island C.C.: 1858 – 08/1861

Lyons, Very Rev. John PP

Date Of Ordination: 1878

Rath and the Islands PP: 1907 – 10/6/1914

Mulcahy, Very Rev. John PP
Date of Ordination: 1857
Cape Clear/Sherkin Island C.C.:1857 – 1860
Last Known Appointment:[Timoleague](#)

O' Brien, Very Rev. Daniel PP
Date of Ordination: 6/8/1876
Last Known Appointment:
Rath and the Islands PP : 7/11/1892 – 9/5/1894

O' Callaghan, Rev. Michael CC
Date of Ordination: 24/6/1888
Sherkin Island CC : 06/1894 – 11/1895
Last Known Appointment: [Skibbereen](#)

O' Donovan, Very Rev. Patrick PP
Date of Ordination: 18/6/1939
Rath and the Islands PP : 1961 – 12/11/1972
Last Known Appointment: [Rath and the Islands](#)

O' Donovan, Very Rev. Timothy PE
Date of Ordination: 28/9/1941
Rath and the Islands PP : 8/12/1972 – 12/10/1987
Last Known Appointment: [Rath and the Islands](#)

O' Driscoll, Very Rev. Jeremiah PP
Date of Ordination: 17/6/1894
Sherkin Island CC : 1909 – 1915
Last Known Appointment: [Timoleague](#)

O' Flynn, Very Rev. Florence (Flor) PE
Date of Ordination: 11/6/1939
Sherkin Island CC : 1947 – 1954
Last Known Appointment: [Mayfield \(St. Joseph's\)](#)

O' Halloran, Rev. Richard CC
Date of Ordination: 11/6/1916
Last Known Appointment: [Rath and the Islands](#)

O' Hea, Very Rev. Timothy PP
Date of Ordination: 21/9/1884
Sherkin Island CC : 1902 – 1905
Last Known Appointment: [Timoleague](#)

O' Hea, Rev. Timothy George CC
Date of Ordination: c.1870
Sherkin Island CC : 07/1870 – 1871
Last Known Appointment: [Timoleague](#)

O' Leary, Mgr. John PP VG
Date of Ordination: 21/6/1874
Rath and the Islands CC : 04/1877 – 03/1878
Last Known Appointment: [Clonakilty](#)

O' Leary, Very Rev. Arthur PP
Date of Ordination: c. 1844
Rath and the Islands PP : 10/1863 – 02/1864
Last Known Appointment: [Ardfield / Rathbarry](#)

O' Sullivan, Rev. Denis CC
Date of Ordination: 24/6/1872
Sherkin Island CC : 09/1873 – 05/1875
Sherkin Island CC : 1881 – 1882
Last Known Appointment: [Rath and the Islands](#)

Richardson, Rev. Timothy CC
Date of Ordination: 5/6/1932
Last Known Appointment: [Rath and the Islands](#)

Young, Very Rev. William PP
Date of Ordination: 17/6/1917
Sherkin Island CC : 07/1917 – 1919
Last Known Appointment: [Barryroe](#)

(Source): <http://corkandross.org/parishes/rath-and-the-islands/> [Accessed: March, 2018].

Conclusion

The church building is in good condition at the time of writing. In the past ten years it has been painted inside and out. General care of the church such as cleaning, taking care of the altar materials and providing flowers is seen to by local families as is the role of the sacristan. An information-sign was put up on the wall outside the church door during the repainting. Visitors to St. Mona's Church may wonder why the pews are angled instead of perpendicular to the walls; this was done to give better access along the aisle for a wedding some years ago and remains so as it creates more space to access the altar.

Mass is usually celebrated on the island on Saturday afternoon as there are not enough priests to allow for Sunday celebration. The priests come into the island from Skibbereen and return to the mainland immediately after the Mass is finished. There has been no permanent resident priest on Sherkin Island since Fr. James Coombes left in 1961. Since that time, priests have always commuted between the island and the mainland to celebrate Mass. Exceptions sometimes occur if a priest happens to be holidaying on the island. The 2016 Census shows that the parish of Rath and the Islands contains a population of 342,¹³⁷ as follows: Cape Clear; 147, Sherkin Island; 111 and Rath, 84. Out of this total of 342, 211 people described themselves as Roman Catholics.

While this indicates the numbers of people who were born into, or adopted, the Roman Catholic faith it does not necessarily translate into numbers who attend weekly mass on a regular basis. On Sherkin Island there is a core group of permanent residents (about a dozen people) who attend mass regularly and keep the church going, and during the summer months and other holiday dates the numbers attending Mass increases significantly. This happens when the island holiday homes are occupied and a percentage of that group attends mass. Casual visitors who may be on the island over the weekends also help boost numbers attending Mass. This is the case throughout the parish, for example, on the neighbouring island of Cape Clear the average attendance at Sunday Mass during the winter months is 25-30.¹³⁸ Again, this number is increased by holiday-home owners and visitors to the island during the summer season and on other holidays, such as Easter and Christmas.

While the numbers of regular church-goers in these rural areas may often be very small, the faithful remain undeterred and continue to gather regularly to celebrate Mass thus ensuring the survival of the Church in sparsely-populated, remote areas. One cannot help but call to mind the relevance of St. Matthew, (18:20): 'For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there with them.'¹³⁹

¹³⁷http://census.cso.ie/sapmap2016/Results.aspx?Geog_Type=ED3409&Geog_Code=2AE196291F3C13A3E05500000000001#SAPMAP_T2_240 [Accessed: 2019/02/14].

The Parish of Rath and the islands is comprised of Rath on the mainland (bounded by the Ilan river on the north, Lough Ine on the south, Baltimore on the west and Oldcourt on the east. (Source):

<http://corkandross.org/parishes/rath-and-the-islands/> [Accessed: 2019/02/14].

¹³⁸ Mary Cadogan, Cape Clear, Co. Cork. Pers. Comm. (February, 2019).

¹³⁹ *Gospel of St. Matthew*, Chapter 18: Verse 20. *New Testament Psalms Proverbs* (The Gideons International 1976 Edition).

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