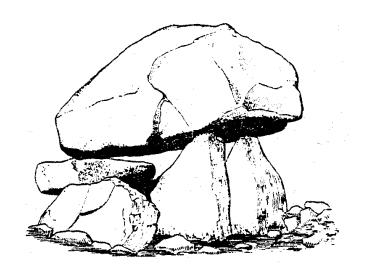
ULSTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Survey Report: No. 4

Survey of St Mary's Church, Ballaghanery Upper, County Down UAS/06/04

In association with



HENRY WELSH

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1. Summary

1.1 A site survey was undertaken at St Mary's Church, County Down (SMR number DOW 049:012), in the townland of Ballaghanery Upper, County Down, Irish Grid reference J 3872 2676. 40m OD.



Figure 1: Location map for St Mary's Church, Bloody Bridge

St Mary's Church is situated in National Trust property and the land on which it is located is currently used for recreational purposes. This was the fourth in a series of planned surveys to be undertaken by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society.

1.2 In order to enhance the archaeological record of this site, the aims of this survey were to produce an accurate plan and section drawing of the monument, carry out a photographic survey and complete a Condition and Management Survey of the Archaeological Resource (CAMSAR) record form. This information was compiled into a report and submitted to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the National Trust.

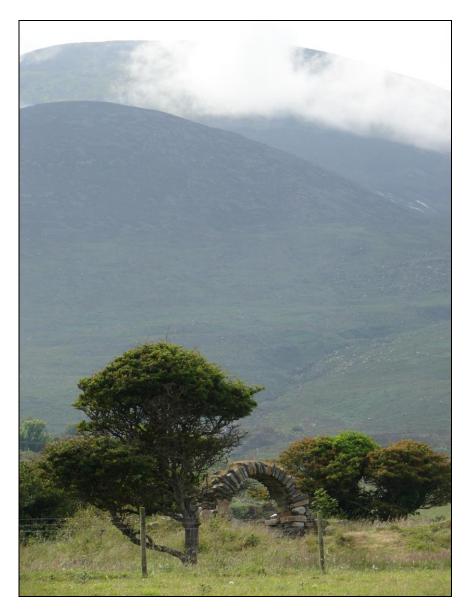


Figure 2: St Mary's Church, viewed from the east

2. Introduction

2.1 Background

The survey of St Mary's Church was carried out on Saturday 24 June 2006 by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society. It was undertaken in response to a decision taken by the committee of the society to extend an opportunity to members to participate in practical surveys of archaeological monuments that had not previously been recorded. This followed a bequest to the society from the late Dr Ann Hamlin, from which the items of survey equipment were purchased. During discussions with Mr Malachy Conway, Survey Archaeologist of the National Trust in Northern Ireland, it was noted that many archaeological sites on National Trust property had not been subject to a detailed archaeological survey. It was therefore agreed that members of the society would commence a programme to survey these sites and St Mary's Church was subsequently chosen to be the fourth of these.



Figure 3: UAS Survey Group at work at St Mary's

2.2 Previous archaeological surveys

The ruins of St Mary's church have attracted the attention of artists, antiquarians and archaeologists for many years and some images confirm the steady deterioration of the structure, even over the last two centuries. For example, in an engraving from the 1830s, the east-facing elevation of the chancel arch is shown to be reasonably well-supported by masonry, although heavily overgrown (see Figure 4 below).

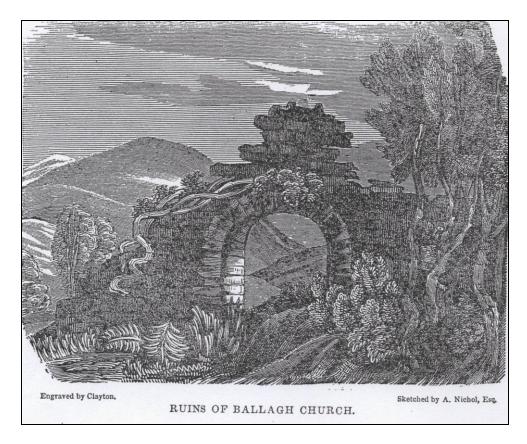


Figure 4: 1830s engraving of the chancel arch, Dublin Penny Journal

In 1844, a sketch by the Archdeacon of Down again depicted the east-facing elevation of the arch, which appeared to confirm that the arch had not deteriorated significantly (see figure 5 below). The site was described as consisting of 'the traces of a building, divided into two parts by the Arch already mentioned; namely, into a Nave 33 feet long and 18 feet wide, and a Chancel 18 feet long and 12 wide' (Archdeacon of Down 1845, 18). In 1878, Reeves referred to the site and how 'St Mary's, or Lower Mourne, was incorporated in the parish of Mourne, or Kilkeel, up to the year 1768', providing similar measurements for the nave at 33ft by 18 ft and chancel at 18 ft by 12 ft., giving an overall length of 51 feet (1878, 29). However, Reeves's reference to the church still being included in the Parish of Mourne in 1768 seems problematic, as a 1743 map shows St Mary's as an 'Old Church', suggesting that it was already a ruin at this time (Harris 1743).

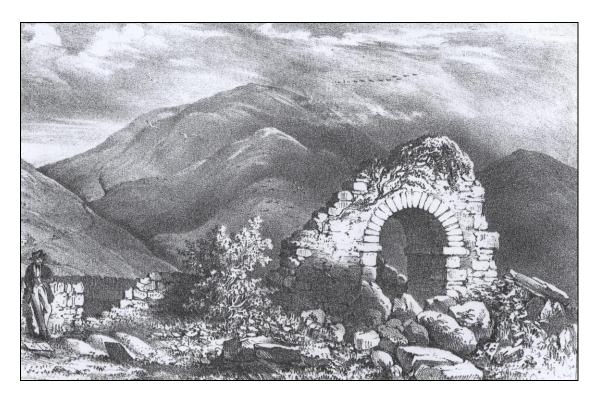


Figure 5: Sketch of the chancel arch, 1844, Archdeacon of Down

An ink sketch of the west-facing elevation, dated to the mid-nineteenth century, appears to show that some of the supporting masonry around the arch has collapsed (see Figure 6 below).

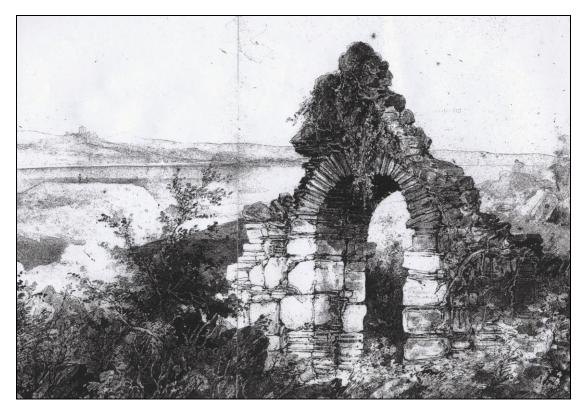


Figure 6: Mid-nineteenth century ink sketch of the chancel arch, in private ownership

The site is also referred to in the Archaeological Survey of County Down, where churches of the later Middle Ages are described as 'simple, rectangular gabled buildings, the division between chancel and nave structurally undefined, and generally small in size' (1966, 130). Sizes are given in terms of length as;

Site	Length (feet) [m]	Site	Length (feet) [m]
Ardkeen (13c)	59 [18.2m]	Ardtole (15c)	75 [23m]
Ballywalter (13c)	97 [29.8m]	Kilbroney (15c)	50 [15m]
Castleboy (13c)	68 [21m]	Kilkeel (15c)	62 [19m]
Loughinisland	41 [15m]	Killyleagh (15c)	67 [20.6]
(Middle) (13c)			
Maghera (13c)	52 [16m]	Magheradrool	63 [19m]
		(15c)	
		Tullynakill (15c)	45 [13.8m]

Figure 7: Table of early church dimensions, County Down (after ASNI 1966)

A description of St Mary's was included in the 1966 survey, where the size of the nave was recorded as being 'internally about 18 ft. [5.5m] by at least 33 ft.[10.1m]' and chancel as '13ft. [4.0m] by about 14 ft. 6 in. [4.4m]'. The only part of the structure described in any detail was the chancel arch as '5 ft. 10 in. [1.8m] wide, with semicircular head, consisting of undressed granite and split-stone voussoirs, rising from plain rough-dressed granite imposts to a height of 3 ft. 1 in. [1.0m] above the springing' (ASNI 1966, 298). However, the plan provided (see Figure 8 below), indicates that the remaining part of the nave was 27 feet 6 inches [8.5m] in length, suggesting that approximately 3 feet 6 inches [1.1m] had been lost as a result of the nineteenth-century widening of the adjacent roadway. If the measurements for the length of St Mary's at 51 feet [15.7m], recorded by Reeves and the Archdeacon of Down, are accepted, then the structure is much smaller than the average length for thirteenth century (63 feet 5 inches [19.5m]) and fifteenth century (60 feet 4 inches [18.6m]) churches as detailed in Figure 7 above.

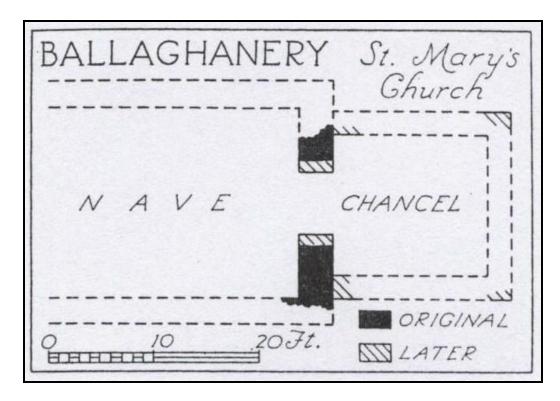


Figure 8: Plan of St Mary's Church, ASNI 1966, 298.

The possibility of an enclosure

St Mary's Church was surveyed during the Archaeological Survey of County Down, when it was noted that 'a line of piled stone to the E. of the church may possibly be the remains of a graveyard enclosure' (1966, 299). No evidence for this line of stone was observed during the 2006 UAS survey. However, it has been claimed that the graveyard extended towards the west of the church and that when the road was being widened in the mid-nineteenth century, bones, gold rings and jewellery were dug up by the workmen (*Mourne Observer*, 7 December 1962). In 1991, in a recently-cut grass field to the west of the site and across the main Newcastle to Annalong road, a series of crop marks were observed. These were described as 'several small circular and sub-circular cropmarks visible as dark rings. 3 rings can be identified, along with possible traces of others. These are roughly 4m in diameter. Hints of cropmarks are also visible in a field just to N – but these are indistinct' (NIEA SMR: DOW 049:016). Similar features were also noted at another ecclesiastical site at Kilmelogue, about six miles to the south-south-west (Macdonald & McIlreavy 2007, 2). It may be that the remains of an enclosure lie undiscovered in the fields to the west of the site.

2.3 Cartographic evidence

St Mary's Church stands 250m south of the mouth of the Bloody Bridge river and the location has been referred to by several names, which can be separated into two groups, those beginning with the prefix Kil and those prefixed with Ballagh. Of the first group, including Kilnahattin (Evans 1951) and Kilnahatin (Ulster Folklife Society), O'Laverty suggests that the name is 'derived from the ancient family of O'Haiteidh, who were princes of Iveagh before the Magennises' (1878, 29), but Ó Mainnín proposes that 'the local pronunciation, however, points to its derivation from

Irish Cill na hAitinne "church of the furze or gorse" (1993, 60). Of the second group are the Ballagh (*Dublin Penny Journal* 1834), Ballagh-a-Neir (Archdeacon of Down 1845,1), Ballaghanery and Capella de Balloch-enevery in a Terrier of 1615 (Ulster Folklife Society) and most recently Ballachanery and Ballaghanery Upper, Ballaghanery deriving from Bealach an Aoire, meaning pass of the shepherd (Ó Mainnín 1993, 20).

The site features on several Ordnance Survey maps (see Figures 9, 10 & 11 below). The first cartographic reference was made on the 1834 First Edition map, where a rectangular area was described as an 'Old Graveyard' including 'St Mary's Church (in ruins)'. The old medieval road and bridge are also clearly shown, as is the nearby St Mary's Stream, just to the north of the site. The site also features on the 1859 Second Edition map, when a larger and more square-shaped graveyard was shown, with a small rectangular building indicating the church remains. The new bridge across the Bloody Bridge River is also shown, as is the widened roadway to the west of the church building. The site of the graveyard was recorded again on the 1904 map, similar in size and annotation to the 1859 map.

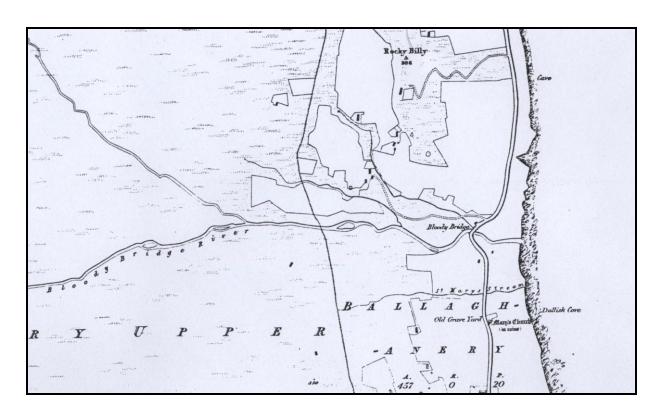


Figure 9: OS First Edition 1834

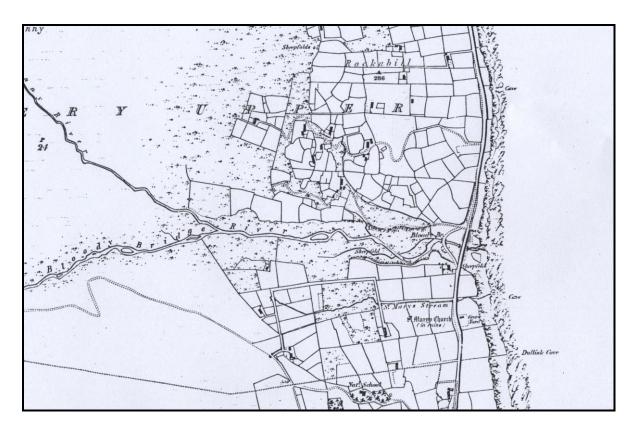


Figure 10: OS Second Edition 1859

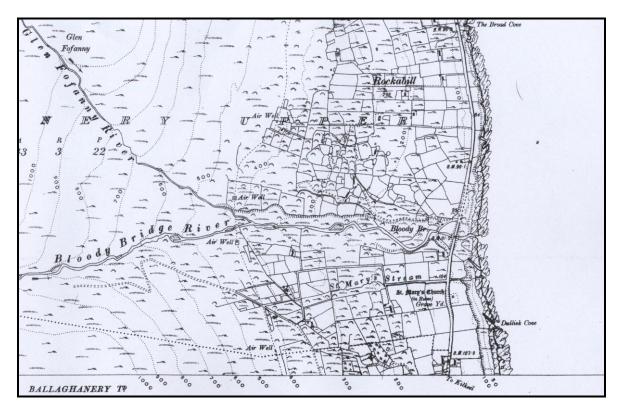


Figure 11: OS Third Edition 1904

2.5 Archiving

Copies of this report have been deposited with the Environment and Heritage Service and the National Trust. All site records are temporarily archived with the Honorary Archivist of the Ulster Archaeological Society.

2.6 Credits and Acknowledgements

The survey was led by Harry Welsh and other members of the survey team were June Welsh, Joan Semple, William Dunlop, Ian Gillespie, Roisin McCaughan, Anne MacDermott, Mary Mulvenna, Ken Pullin, George Rutherford and Harry Porter. The Ulster Archaeological Society is particularly grateful to Mr Malachy Conway, Survey Archaeologist of the National Trust, who worked closely with the survey team in choosing the site and facilitating access.

3. Survey

3.1 Methodology

It was decided that the survey would take the form of the production of plan and profile drawings, accompanied by a photographic survey and the completion of a Condition And Management Survey of the Archaeological Resource (CAMSAR) form. A report was compiled using the information obtained from these sources, in addition to background documentary material.

3.2 Production of plan and section drawings

Plan and profile drawings were completed, using data obtained from a field survey. Measurements were obtained by using the society's *Leica Sprinter 100* electronic measuring device. Sketch plans at 1:200 scale were completed on site by recording these measurements on drafting film secured to a plane table and backing up the data on a field notebook for subsequent reference. Field plans were later transferred to a computer-based format for printing.

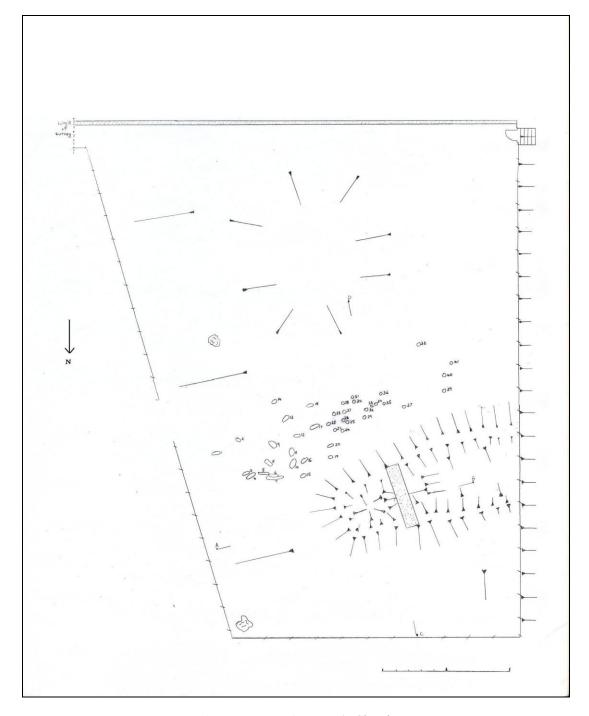


Figure 12: Plan of St Mary's Church

An almost circular depression, measuring 13.5m east-west by 12.5m north-south was noted 17m south of the church. This could either have been a feature such as a holy well (no bibliographical reference for this) or modern disturbance possibly associated with the re-construction of the nearby road.

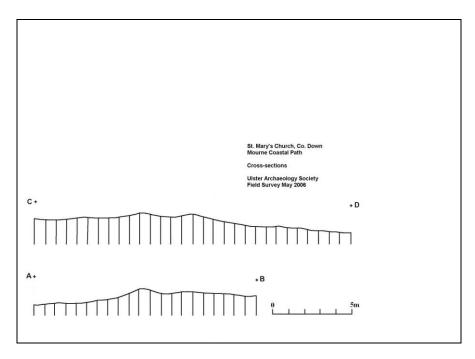


Figure 13: Profiles of St Mary's Church

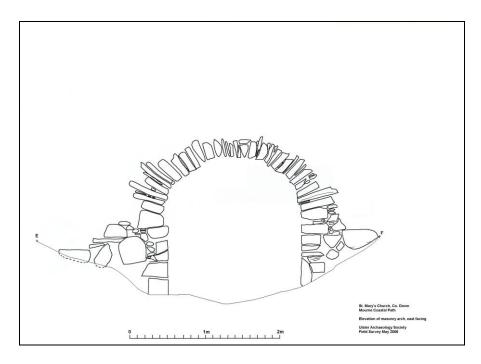


Figure 14: East-facing elevation of chancel arch

3.3 Photographic archive

A photographic record of the site was taken by using a *Nikon Coolpix S1* 5 megapixel digital camera and a photograph record sheet was employed, corresponding to photographs taken during the site survey on 27 May 2006. The archive has been compiled in jpeg format and saved to compact disc.



Figure 15: Chancel arch, looking west

During the survey, one shard of glazed pottery was discovered in a crevice between two grave markers. This item has been archived with the National Trust.

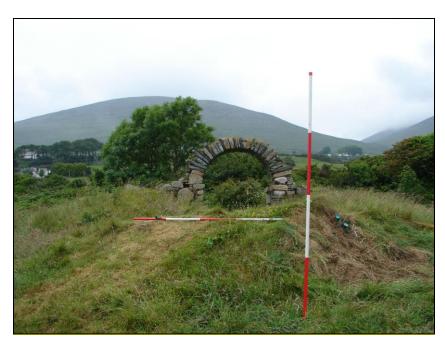


Figure 16: Extant walls at St Mary's Church, looking west



Figure 17: Chancel arch, looking east

3.4 Completion of CAMSAR form

A Condition and Management Survey of the Archaeological Resource (CAMSAR) form was completed by the survey team on 27 May 2006 and is given in appendix 1 below. As far as is known, this is the first occasion on which this type of record form has been completed for the monument.

3.5 Graveyard survey

A number of granite boulders were observed during the survey, principally on the southern side of the monument. These were interpreted as grave markers, although some may be structural remains from the church building. All were recorded using the Memorial Recording Form suggested by Harold Mytum and the results tabulated (Mytum 2000, 80). All visible grave markers were recorded, but more may be present along the western boundary of the site, which was not surveyed due to the presence of impenetrable bushes. The graveyard survey has been bound as a separate supplement to this report.

4. Discussion

It is difficult to reach a firm conclusion about the origins and development of St Mary's church as it does not fall easily into one particular type of monument. As detailed by Edwards, 'not all churches were necessarily monastic; some were major churches founded by bishops, others were regional churches with clergy administering to a lay population group. As well as the major monasteries and their daughter houses, there were also hermitages and small independent foundations attached to family estates' (1990, 100). However, some clues are to be found in its location and form.

4.1 Location of the monument

There are a number of possibilities for the siting of St Mary's church at Ballaghanery Upper. First, it may have been on the route of an early Christian pilgrimage, probably connected with St Domangart, or Donard and similar to that of St Kevin at

Glendalough in County Wicklow. A brief description of the activities of St Donard in the area was made in 1905 and while no specific mention was made of a pilgrim route, reference is made to his 'spending the life of a hermit on the mountain which bears his name' and after his death how 'people in this neighbourhood climb up the mountain to do penance' (Lett 1905, 231). Later claims have been made that it 'had been a Celtic foundation and was one of the stations on the Slieve Donard pilgrimage' (Ulster Folklife Society 1984, 2). The remains of several ecclesiastical sites are scattered along this possible pilgrim route, beginning in the south with Kilfeaghan [not in SMR], Tamlaght (DOW 055:038), Greencastle (DOW 057:002), Kilkeel (DOW 056:026), Kilmeloge (DOW 056:014), Kilhorne (056:011) and Ballagh [St Mary's] (DOW 049:012). The remains of the early Kilhorne church were archaeologically excavated in 2006-7 and revealed a small ecclesiastical enclosure representing 'either a minor monastic site or a small church with an attached priest that served a lay community' (Macdonald & McIlreavy 2007, 2).

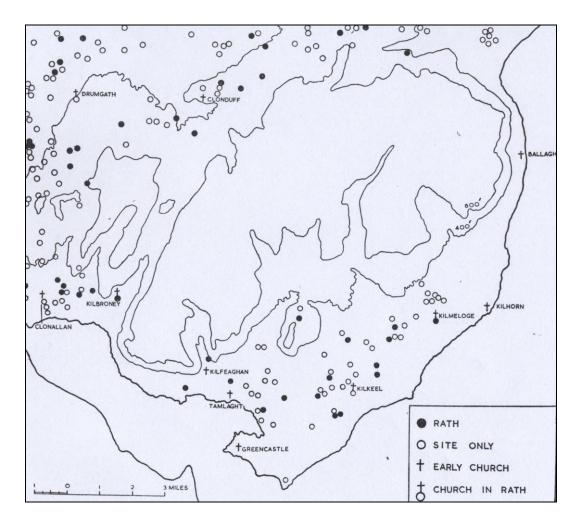


Figure 18: Early churches in the Mourne area (after Evans 1989, 100)

Second, St Mary's was so sited as to have a strategic value in the initial establishment of the early church in the area, being on one of only three routes around the Mourne Mountains (see Figure 18 above). These are inland from Newry, through Hilltown to Newcastle, another from Rostrevor to connect with this route and the coastal route,

which follows the coast from Rostrevor to Newcastle. It has been suggested that the church was concerned to win and hold the coast road which St. Patrick had not traversed' (Evans 1951, 106). As several of these ecclesiastical sites were found to be associated with raths or cashels, Evans went on to suggest that the 'the distribution of the raths emphasizes the central position of the mother church of Kilkeel, from which the parish corresponding in extent to the Kingdom of Mourne was to take its name' (1951, 101). Evans also detailed how St Patrick had 'a prolonged tussle with the unbelievers on the north side of the mountains. The story goes that he converted Donard, a chieftain who lived at Rath Murbolg – the present Maghera – only after a protracted display of his powers'. Donard later went on to establish a monastic settlement at Maghera (1951, 104). On the northern route, there are Kilbroney (DOW 051:058), Drumgath (DOW 047:042) and Clonduff (DOW 048:019), churches that 'gave their names to parishes on the "back side" of the Mourne Mountains' (Evans 1951, 106). The only other centre of early Christian influence in the area was at Newry, where there is some evidence to suggest that an early Christian monastery had been established and 'whatever was there was refounded by Bishop Máel uá Morgair in 1144. Thirteen years later, in 1157, it received considerable endowments from Maurice O'Loughlin, King of all-Ireland; he granted the monastery to the Cistercians and colonised it from the mother church at Mellifont' (Rankin 2006, 329).



Figure 19: The medieval bridge over the Bloody Bridge River



Figure 20: Remains of the medieval coast road just north of St Mary's

The third possibility is that St Mary's was associated with a group of churches, under the authority of one particular site, to service the local community although references to this appear to be of later date and follow the influence of the Anglo-Normans is the area. The first Anglo-Norman incursion into the north of Ireland was in February 1177, led by John de Courcy who 'commanded a scratch force drawn from the Dublin garrison' (Flanders 2008, 127). It was only after defeating the local chieftain Mac Duinn Schléibe and consolidating his hold in the area that he could turn his attention to matters of patronage and support for ecclesiastical structures. The first of which was to grant the area of Mac Duinn Schléibe's rath, on what is now Cathedral Hill, to the church and construct his own focus of secular authority nearby at what is now known as the Mound of Down (Flanders 2008, 139). In 1197, he revived the monastic site at Nendrum and in 1183 established a priory in Ards, in addition to 'promoted the founding of a community of Benedictine monks to serve the cathedral of Downpatrick' (Flanders 2008, 155). He later supported the establishment of Grey Abbey and a house for Premonstratensian monks at Carrickfergus. These sites confirm that the Anglo-Normans were primarily interested in extending their area of influence and it is unlikely that they would have devoted much effort to consolidate their hold on a strategically unimportant area such as the Mourne coastal route. Despite this, it has been suggested that St Mary's 'in Anglo-Norman times...was one of a number of churches attached to the rectory of Kilkeel' (Ulster Folklife Society 1984, 1-2).

A.D. 1406, Patrick Oweyn presented by the King to the church of 'St. Colman of Kylkele'. – Cal. Canc. Hib., p. 183. From these authorities, it appears that the names Morne and Kilkeel were used indifferently to denote the same parish. In 1526, Kilcayll was described as a 'Plebania' or Mother-church, having under it several tributary chapels. – Reg. Cromer, fol. 473. Of these, the names of five are

preserved, viz., Kilcoo, Kilmegan, Balochaneir, Tamlaght (in the townland Lisnacree), and Greencastle (Reeves 1847, 27).

The association between St Mary's and the parish of Kilkeel does not shed much light on the fortunes of St Mary's as 'Kilkeel was not the most prosperous of churches in the middle ages...the income...does not exceed 10 marks sterling, inasmuch as this benefice is situated in the border land between the Irish and English, where wars for the most part prevail, and the country is depopulated'. Also, Kilkeel 'enjoyed some degree of independence from Episcopal jurisdiction derived from the fact that it was a *plebania* or "mother church" which stood at the head of a group of churches including Kilcoo and Kilmegan [and St Mary's] which are, of course, outside the parish' (Ó Mainnín 1993, 5).

There were some cures which had chapels-of-ease belonging to them and those who officiated in them were called *capellani* and had their subsistence out of the oblations and obventions and were often perpetual and presentative. And where the incumbents had several chapels-of-ease and only assistants to supply them, the canon law doth not call them rectores but *plebani*; who had a sort of peculiar jurisdiction in lesser matters, but they were still under the bishop's authority in visitations and other ecclesiastical censures. (Stillingfleet, cited in Rankin 2006, 330).

On the whole, 'the 12th- and 13th century- Anglo-Norman documentation is, in relation to Mourne, virtually silent' (Ibid., 6). The inescapable conclusion is that after the Anglo-Norman conquest, the area in which St Mary's church was located was a poor parish with sparse population and short on patronage, fell into disuse after the focus of ecclesiastical life shifted north to the great abbeys and priories. In July 1609, the three dioceses of Down, Dromore and Connor were established by James I and 'to the Treasurer of Down Cathedral were granted the rectories and vicarages of Kilkeel, Tamlaght, Kilmegan and Kilcoo, almost, but not quite co-extensive with the pre-Reformation *plebania* of Kilkeel' (Rankin 2006, 331). St Mary's was not mentioned in this text and was probably a ruin at this time.

4.2 Form of the monument

While the current remains at St Mary's are of mortared stone, this may be a replacement for an earlier wooden structure. 'There is no clear evidence to indicate when mortared stone building reached Ireland' (Hare & Hamlin 1986, 131), but on the basis of the documentary sources both Harbinson (1982, 620) and Hamlin (1984, 119) concur that stone churches were found on a few important sites in the 8th and 9th centuries, with increasing evidence in the 10th century; it is only in the 11th and 12th centuries that references to stone churches become common' (Hare & Hamlin 1984, 131).

St Mary's church currently consists of a rectangular nave and rectangular chancel, connected by a chancel arch in the Romanesque style. The nave and chancel type of church construction 'is far less common in early Irish architecture than is normally recognised... but...does occur regularly in the 12th century' (Hare & Hamlin 1984, 134). As the surviving walls are overgrown, it is not possible to confirm that the two parts of the building are contemporary, or if the chancel was a later addition. As Hughes and Hamlin confirm, 'early Irish churches have often undergone much alteration, and it is instructive to look for signs of additions and subtractions, changes

in masonry, straight joints, and blocked or altered openings' (Hamlin & Hughes 1977, 64). The chancel arch at St Mary's is of Romanesque style and H.G. Leask 'suggested a time-span for Irish Romanesque from the late eleventh century to about 1200, but Mr de Paor has more recently argued convincingly that Cormac's Chapel at Cashel, dedicated in 1134, marks the beginning. Two-cell, nave and chancel, plans became more common in the twelfth century' (Hamlin & Hughes 1977, 64).

Another example of a nave and chancel church can be found at Reefert in the monastic site of Glendalough, County Wicklow (Figure 21 below) Reefert church clearly displays a Romanesque chancel arch, as at St Mary's and it has been suggested that 'this nave-and-chancel church dates from around 1100' (OPW 2008, 5). This is supported by O'Keefe, who extends the range slightly by saying that 'a date in the later eleventh century or early twelfth century for Reefert...therefore seems likely' (2003, 84-85). The remains of another nave and chancel church, St Kieran's, can also be seen at Glendalough (Figure 22 below). These remains were not discovered until 1875 and it is thought that this church 'probably commemorates St. Kieran, the founder of Clonmacnoise, a monastic settlement that had associations with Glendalough during the 10th century' (OPW 2008, 4). If an arch was present at St Kieran's, no trace of it survives, but both St Kieran's and Reefert churches are of similar dimensions and ground plan to St Mary's.



Figure 21: Reefert Church, Glendalough, County Wicklow



Figure 22: St Kieran's Church, Glendalough, County Wicklow

From the evidence available, it seems possible that there was an ecclesiastical site at St Mary's from the fifth century AD and that it survived throughout the early Christian period, at least until the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in the area in the twelfth century. Perhaps originally a timber building, it was reconstructed in stone, with the addition of a chancel around the early twelfth century. A combination of sparse population, exacerbated by the Black Death in the fourteenth century and a shift in ecclesiastical power to the big abbeys to the north and south, finally forced its abandonment, probably during the fifteenth century at the latest.

5. Recommendations for further work

It seems clear from the survey and research undertaken that the remains of St Mary's church are of significant archaeological importance and require further investigation. This could be by limited excavation to identify phases of construction, building styles used and possible dating evidence and by geophysical survey, to identify any possible enclosure and the extent of the remaining graveyard on either side of the Newcastle to Annalong Road.

The present state of repair of the remaining structure is poor and during the 2006 UAS survey, it was observed that the chancel arch is now almost totally unsupported and in danger of complete collapse (see Figure 23 below). It is recommended that the remains of the chancel arch are protected from further erosion and perhaps consolidated by the rebuilding of part of the adjacent chancel walls.



Figure 23: Loss of supporting stonework from the chancel arch, looking north

A gate is currently provided at the south-western corner of the site. This gate provides direct access on to the main Newcastle to Kilkeel road on what can only be described as a dangerous bend. As alternative access is currently provided to the site from the coastal path, it is recommended that as a safety precaution, the gated entrance is sealed as a matter of urgency.

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PHOTOGRAPH RECORD FORM

Site: St Mary's Church, Ballaghanery Upper, County Down

Date: 24 June 2006 & 14 March 2008

Film no.	B/W Print	Colour print	Colour slide	Digital image (m.pixels)
				5.1

Make and model of camera: Nikon Coolpix SI

Frame	Direction	Details
no	viewed from	
001	North	Main road (A2) Newcastle to Annalong
002	East	Gate and 5 steps to road
003	North	Signboard near to gate
004	North	Large stone
005	West	Back view of arch
006	North	Tea lights set within arch
007	South	Reduction in size of arch
008	North	View of arch interior at full width
009	South	Base of arch on north side showing partial collapse
010	West	Corner tree
011	North	View of site (chancel)
012	North	View of site (nave)
013	North	View of north wall of nave truncated by road
014	East	View of south wall of nave truncated by road
015	East	Stone number 9
016	East	Beside stone Number 9 (possibly number 13)
017	East	Alignment of stones
018	West	Tree number 2
019	East	View of site
020	South	View of site