

Information on Cillíní and Unmarked Burials in Private and Institutional Cemeteries in Ireland.



The Shoe-Box Babies of Ireland





Archaeological excavation at The Bog Meadows Site 2010

Submissions to Irish Government Investigation into areas of Institutional Marginalised Burial.



Plate 2. Baby Markers at Recovered Graves at Milltown Cemetery, Belfast 2014 [REDACTED]

To Whom It May Concern,

The revelations surrounding the death and potential burial of infants and children at the Tuam Mother and Baby Home in Galway has resonated around the world and shocked our global community. We protest at the horror of it and demand justice for those who were the most vulnerable in Irish society at a time when such violation of basic human rights could be inflicted without associated accountability from either society, state or church. However, this is not an isolated incident but was in fact a wide spread practice to my personal knowledge, until at least the 1990's. Marginalised infant and adult burial in unmarked mass inhumation graves is an issue which has impacted over time on the different religious and cultural traditions of our society across Ireland.

The work I have done in Northern Ireland over the past decades, has focused on the issue of exactly this type of marginalised burial and the plight of those souls disposed of in this unsanctified and anonymous way. However, the nature of the research into these areas of marginalised burial ground has raised other questions which need to be addressed as a matter of urgency, ultimately that of identification and protection for these sites within a legal framework which also encompasses all those locations considered to be 'Private Cemeteries'. In other words, any area of burial ground in Ireland attached to chapel, church or meeting house, including religious cemeteries and establishments, institutional burial grounds, workhouse cemeteries, poor ground, mental hospitals and what has been regarded in the past as industrial schools.

For these locations today, there is little or no legal protection within the current UK or Irish legislative framework and the religious organisations responsible for them can treat the land and all those buried there, as they deem fit without any level of accountability to society.

An example of how much is recoverable from research of such sites is reflected in my work into the Milltown Cemetery site in Belfast. There we recovered 6.28 acres which contained the remains of approximately 11,000 documented burials of children and adults buried together in unmarked, mass inhumation graves. While this number seems unbelievable, it is in no way the true number of those buried at this location as the impact of undocumented infant burial added to open Poor Ground graves and Cillini burials across The Bog Meadows, conducted under the cover of darkness, could easily double that bottom line.

Taking all this on board, there are a number of measures which need to be considered to allow for the systematic investigation of all Mother and Baby Homes and other institutional sites across Northern Ireland and Ireland as a whole which are impacted by marginalised burial.

- ✧ **Investigation and cross referencing of all documentation from church and state in relation to the all individuals (Children and adults) admitted over time to the institutions under investigation, taking into account the various phases and nature of occupation for the institution in question.**

To this end, admission books and letters of admission from church, family or state together with records of movement for individuals between institutions, both north and south of the border.

- ✧ **Records of all children born at such institutions.**

Access to all birth and baptism registers for the institutions and cross referencing with state records – What happened to these children? – What was the situation in relation to stillborn? i.e. Northern Ireland had no records in relation to stillborn infants prior to 1962 – Therefore, no birth or death certificates exist for these children. After 1962 a register was kept by the government and a certificate of 'Stillbirth' can now be obtained by the family – My understanding is that this provision was not introduced in the south until the 1990s.

- ✧ **Records of children and adults who died while in the care of the institutions, or in hospitals while still recorded as resident at the institution in question.**

Date and causes of death - Consider also any and all associated reports from inspectors, medical practitioners including hospital records – If a child died at a hospital, very often the hospital arranged burial (Or disposal). Perhaps records for stillbirths and how they were buried may exist within the hospital mortuary records.

- ✧ **Desktop investigation of all historic and current maps and leases to determine the original extent of the site and any indication of areas of burial, either inside or outside the institutional boundary associated with the different phases of occupation i.e., Workhouses and Mother and Baby Home's.**

Has the boundary changed over time and to what extent? - Has any part of the original land been sold, when and to whom? – Aerial photographs are an invaluable source of information, as for instance at Tuam. (See photograph supplied)

- ✧ **On-site survey of location and associated land by qualified scientists and researchers to determine the extent of any and all areas of potential burial highlighted by the desktop survey.**

Archaeologists, Anthropologists, Ethnographers, Geophysicists and Historians etc.

- ✧ **Identification of areas of interest for further investigation and excavation to establish the presence or absence of human remains at a number of locations**

Test trenches – Location of which are to be determined after all lines of investigation have been considered including ethnographic evidence.

- ✧ **Retrieval of any human remains from a site for forensic analyses, take note of the potential use of suitable storage for non-earth burials.**

Example of the type of information that could potentially be determined from skeletal analysis. It could also indicate instances of neglect or abuse.

- ✧ **Determine any damage or destruction of all or any areas of burial due to development of the site and associated land.**

Are the houses at Tuam built on burial ground? – Yes! However, the scale indicates that these are likely to be famine graves rather than M&B Home graves - The Ariel photography now in my possession indicates a large area of potential burial in what is known locally as the 'Bishop's Field', located under and beyond the football pitch on the other side of the road and beside the established cemetery (Refer to supplied photograph).

⤴ **Consultation of options for commemoration for all those buried at the site with surviving relatives and local population.**

Consideration must be given to where any memorial should be cited i.e. where no damage can be caused to identified graves.

⤴ **Produce report.**

Report **must** be available to the public otherwise ambiguity remains.

Example of Retrievable Information from Forensic Analysis of Skeletal Remains from a Site.

- ⤴ A forensic or dental archaeologist will be able to tell with near certainty, whether or not an infant was stillborn using the neonatal line. The neonatal line is a type of hypo-plastic lesion that is thought to occur when the stress of childbirth interrupts the enamel secretion. If an infant survived birth and by at least seven to ten days afterwards, the neonatal line will be visible under an ordinary light microscope. If, however, the infant was stillborn or died shortly after delivery, the neonatal line will not appear.
- ⤴ A forensic archaeologist will be able to find evidence of systemic physiological stress such as disease and malnutrition in both children and adults by examining yet another type of hypo-plastic lesion called linear enamel hypoplasia, or LEH. LEH are areas of unusually thin enamel deposits that appear as linear indentations across the anterior teeth.
- ⤴ When teeth are developing, the enamel is formed in a daily rhythm. Consequently, forensic science will be able to pinpoint how old an individual was at the time a stress episode occurred (i.e., how old was the child when he/she was suffering from malnutrition - How old was the child when he/she was ill?) To do this, one needs to

locate the neonatal line and counts the number of perikymata between the neonatal line and the LEH. The number is approximately the number of days between birth and the stress episode.

The Need for New Legislation to Protect Burial Ground in Private Cemeteries.

The issue of current limited legislation in relation to Private Cemeteries, in both Northern and Southern Ireland, has resulted in the reduced scrutiny of the procedures and accountability of management for a large number of these unmarked burial grounds which include areas of unmarked Poor Ground, institutional burial ground such as Mother and Baby Homes, the Magdalene Laundries and Cillini (Children's Burial grounds within the landscape).

Recent investigation into the sale of burial ground by the Trustees of Milltown Cemetery in Belfast in 2000, with the full and certain knowledge that the ground contained the burials of tens of thousands of unbaptised infants, children and adults, in unmarked mass inhumation graves (Many from Mother and baby Homes) has highlighted the scant nature and fragility of protection for such locations.

The survey of existing areas of burial ground, either within the confines of established cemeteries (Private or council) or at isolated locations within the landscape would at least recognise their existence and systematic excavation of sites would help to establish the extent and nature of the burials they contain. In this way, the previous loss and destruction which has been a factor of institutional burial ground and Cillini in the past, may be prevented in the future and an important aspect of the cultural heritage of Irish communities, will be preserved.

Another aspect of this problem is the 'Gate Keeper' mentality of those who control the general information and documentation of burials in private cemeteries. This is an unsatisfactory situation which has recently resulted in the exacerbation of a difficult situation in relation to the investigation of sites such as Milltown Cemetery Belfast, Sean Ross Abbey in Tipperary and Tuam in Galway. This situation has actively hampered research by families and their consultant in an effort to resolve the nature of often unmarked burial grounds and their true extent within the landscape.

This behaviour is morally and religiously reprehensible and demonstrates the need to take ultimate control over the future protection of such records and documentation, along with the

areas of burial and place it firmly in the hands of government departments and local council authorities within a legal framework.

Only when all these measures and any others considered applicable by the archaeological survey and research teams have been implemented, will we understand what truly happened at the institutions and locations to be investigated. In this way, we can analysis the data collected and identify the presence (Or absence) of systemic patterns of care/neglect at these institutions.

I have worked in this area of archaeology now for almost twenty years and been responsible for the identification of new archaeological sites and previously unidentified associated areas of marginalised burial at existing historic sites within Northern Ireland

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Archaeologist / Anthropologist

Conclusion.

The Catholic Church is duty bound to help and support all those in their quest for knowledge who have family members buried in private and institutional burial grounds across the island of Ireland, but instead, they are more concerned with the fallout of another scandal. In truth, they are blind to the reality of their situation as the body of the church is falling away from the Catholic Church itself. We the people are the church, not the men in black and if what I have witnessed and recorded is an indicator of the trust issues people have with the clergy, then the church is in for a storm and one in which it will have to humble itself to survive. While the relatives of the babies buried at Cillíní across Ireland may not individually represent a threat to the established churches, as a united front they are a force to be reckoned with and they have learned the advantage of media spin.

The presence of Cillíní and marginalised institutional burial within the Irish landscape is an inescapable fact and remains a link with shame in the psyche of Irish Christians. The Church's attitude to these burial grounds is at last changing and some locations have been consecrated, to the delight of the family members who survive. However, as my research shows there are too many which still remain unrecognised not only by the Catholic Church, but Christianity in general and neglected by local populations, as the traditions surrounding them and their locations and indeed their very existence becomes vague and lost among the dusty volumes of records held by government departments and churches alike.

The attitudes of the early Christian church in relation to the fate of infants and children who died without baptism, or suffered from the social or religious stigmatization of illegitimacy is inhumane by today's standards. It had taken fifteen hundred years to reform the Catholic Church since the time of St Augustine, or so we like to think, but the fact that this tradition of marginalised infant burial, continued into the mid 1990s in Ireland speaks volumes about the influence on society of the adherence by the Catholic Church to this outdated theology and the degree of suffering imposed on grieving parents at a very vulnerable time in their lives.

I always caution that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. The presence, or indeed absence of a headstone at a grave highlights the issue of crafting a personal identity within a cultural context for the dead, it addresses the value of the deceased more than any other aspect of memorialisation and without some form of representation of who they were,

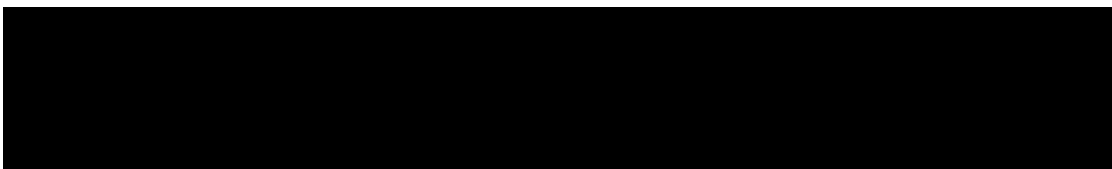
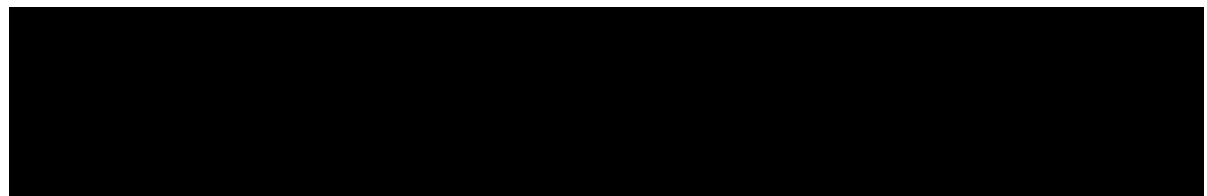
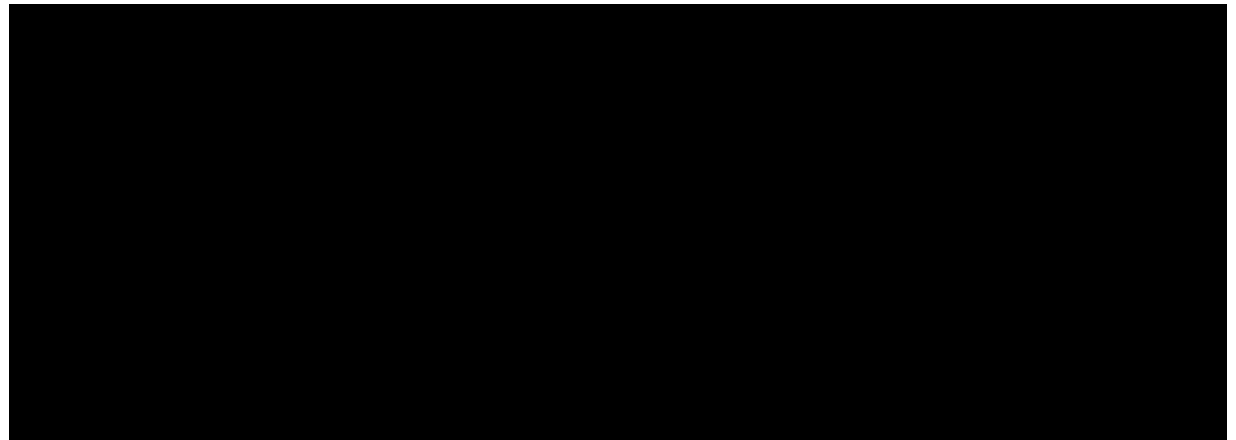
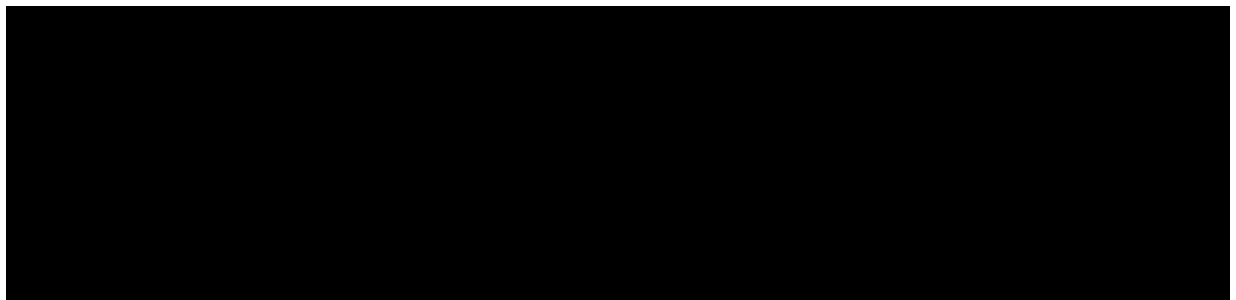
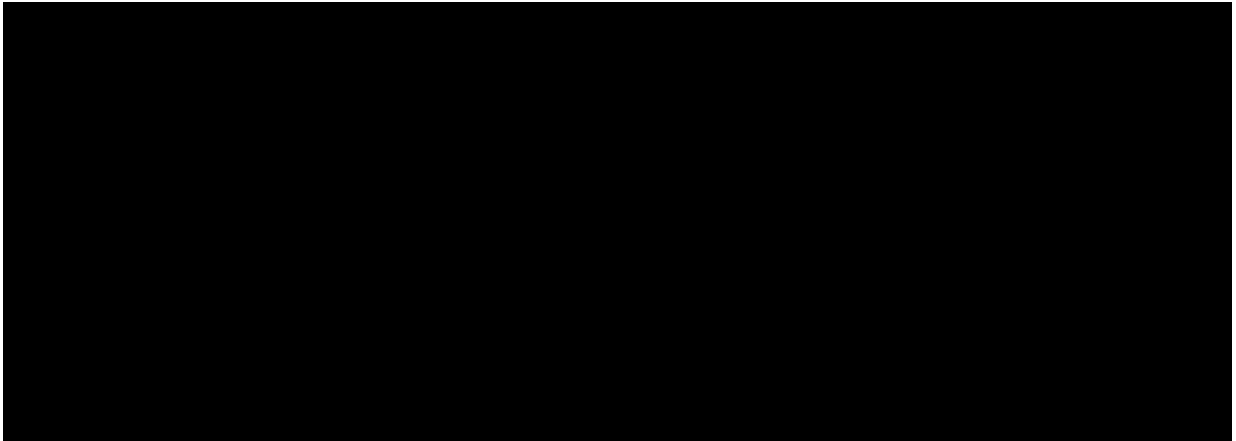
the dead remain anonymous in the landscape.

Those buried in unmarked ground are largely ignored by society and their transition into obscurity is well under way. They are remembered only by those members of their family who know of their existence, but in many cases all memory of these children is lost when the parents die and society and the Church alike shroud their very existence in mystery. The time for the religious recognition and consecration of these burial grounds is long overdue and it remains to be seen if the church will pick up the gauntlet that I am throwing down on this issue.

We as a society can no longer leave it in the hands of religious institutions to protect these burial grounds as the destruction and sale of a number in recent times has shown. We need to place a strategy within a legal framework which gives ultimate control back to the people. A program of identification and survey of all sites should be carried out to include the investigation not only their occurrence, but also how far the burials spread and occur in the landscape and establish any damage or loss of burials.

They do say that a little revolution now and then is a good thing, we shall soon see if that is true.

Useful Links:





Face the Facts: BBC Radio 4 Documentary. ‘*A Thousand Philomena’s*’

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b048n3fj> (Broadcast 14th May 2014)

File on 4: BBC Documentary. ‘*The Lost Children of Marianvale*’

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0b3cw3m> (Broadcast 27th May 2018)

Al Jazeera: Ireland’s Mother and Baby Scandal (Part 1) | People and Power

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F65Mc3oBylk>

Al Jazeera: Ireland’s Mother and Baby Scandal (Part 2) | People and Power

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zq__aXARjEs