

BÁTHADH PHROCHLAISC

THE BRUCKLESS DROWNINGS

ON

FEBRUARY 11th-12th 1813



AN RADHARC Ó'N LEARGA MÓR

Cuan Fionn Trá—Port na Croise—Drim na n-Ugh—Cuan na g-Ceall—Cuan Phrochlaise—Rinn Charraigrois. Ann seo a thárla an Ármach ar an oidhche údaigh i Mí Feabhra 1813.

THE VIEW FROM LARGYMORE

Fintragh Bay—Portnacross—Drimanoo—Killybegs Bay—MacSwayne's Bay—St. John's Point. It was in this area that the Disaster happened that night in February 1813.

CONTENTS

Reamhrá---Foreword	3
Bruckless-The Great Drowning	5
Notes on Thomas Colin McGinley's Account	7
Bruckless Tragedy	8
Báthadh Phrochlaisc as "Gaeilge Theilinn"	9
Sliocht as alt le Míchéal Ó Domhnaill	11
Extract by Aidan Manning	11
Commanders of the Wind by Brendan McWilliams	12
A Donegal Memory	13
The Ship-Sinking Witch	22
E-mail from Kevin Haughey	27
The Bruckless Drowning	29
The Great Drowning in Bruckless Bay	30
Báthadh Phrochlaisc---An Port	31
Bruckless Drownings---The Story and Tune	33
Extract from "The Parish of Killaghtee" by Patrick J. McGill.	34
Extract from "Shipwrecks of the Irish Coast" by Edward J. Bourke.	36
Letter from Donegal County Library	37
Bathadh Bhruchlais le Eighneachan Ó Muireadhaigh	38
Addendum	39

REAMHRÁ---FOREWORD

I have long been interested in the story of Báthadh Phrochlaisc/The Great Bruckless Drowning. I had a few pieces about it in my books and lately, Mick Browne and Paddy Cunningham of Carrick gave me a long Poem about the Disaster, so I decided to put all the pieces together.

The Sorcery theme runs through all the versions. This is no wonder. Here in Rinn na Cille we have an Ancient Well called Tobar na C6rach/The Well of the Fair Winds. This well was teemed by the Teelin womenfolk in order to change the airt of the wind to hasten their menfolk home from the Sligo-Mayo coast when they were stranded there by unfavourable weather. See Page 19 in "Teileann Inné agus Inniu" and Pages 41-42 in "Oidhreacht Ghleann Cholm Cille". There is also a Tobar na C6rach on Inishmurray. The islanders there poured the water from this well on the sea when the island was stormbound in order to settle the storm. See Page 29 in "Inishmurray: Ancient Monastic Island" by Patrick Heraughty

On Page 10, I have a piece by Brendan McWilliams who writes the daily Weather Eye column in the "Irish Times". Here, he discusses the belief that witches and warlocks could change the weather--a belief held it seems from Bruckless to Archangel and referred to also by William Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott.

Recently I was given a copy of a Bealoideas article called "The Ship-Sinking Witch" by Críostóir MacCáthraigh of the Folklore Department, UCD. The article details the "Practice" of Witchcraft and Spells along the shores of North-Western Europe. I have included some extracts from this article on Pages 20-23, which may explain the Biddy Devenney episode in the Bruckless Drownings.

There is confusion about the date of the Bruckless Disaster:

Thomas Colin McGinley/Kinnfaela gives February 1813. See Page 3. The People's Press gives 8th February 1813. See Page 6.

Aidan Manning gives 12th February 1814. See extract on Page 9.

Samuel Lewis in "Topographical Dictionary of Ireland" 1837, states that "Killaghtee many parishioners are employed in fishing and on the 12th February 1814 twenty fishing boats and forty-three men were lost in a squall". (Courtesy of Conall Mac Cuinneagáin).

Rev. James B. Leslie in "Raphoe Clergy and Parishes" (1940), gives the date as 14th February 1814. See Page 27.

Míchéal ó Domhnaill gives 16th December 1815. See Page 9.

Edward J. Bourke in his book "Shipwrecks of the Irish Coast 1105-1993" (1994) gives the date as 16th December 1815. See Page 28.

One of the accounts quoted by Chríostóir MacCáthraigh in his article "The Ship-Sinking Witch" gives the year as 1825. See Page 21.

As stated in the Aidan Manning extract, there were many fishing disasters along our coastline and this may have led to the confusion about the date.

See new information on pages 17 and 18 supplied by Kevin Haughey, Roxboro', Kilcar and Dublin.

I visited Séamus McShane, Publican, Dunkineely, recently and he told me that his Great-Grandfather from Binroe, Bruckless, survived the Disaster. He also said that the local Fishermen from Bruckless and St. John's Point knew the fishing area well and so, many of them survived. He also mentioned that some of the "In Through" bodies were badly decomposed when recovered and that the horses refused to draw them. But the Connolly's, who were the Landlords in Clogher, Carrick, had a team of oxen, which they sent out to Bruckless and the oxen drew the bodies to Kilcar and Glencolumkille for burial.

I went on the Internet and I find that the Derry Journal/Londonderry Journal has been published since 3rd June 1772 and that it is preserved on microfilm from that date until 19th March 1880 in the Centre of Migration Studies at the Ulster-American Folk Park, Omagh. The Website states that the microfilms from 2nd January 1810—29th December 1818 are there.

Also in 1813 Bonaparte was still in power in France, so I expect there was an English Military/Naval presence in Killybegs. The English, being good record keepers, some of their records for the period should be still available.

From my reading the Brendan MacWilliams pieces in the Irish Times, I understand that unofficial Meteorology records for 1813 and earlier exist. Perhaps some of these could throw light on the suddenness, severity and extent of the February 1813 Storm.

It is but nine years until the Bi-Centenary of the Disaster and hopefully a Commemoration will take place and a Memorial erected.

The images I used, I found on the Internet except the one on Page 6, which is from "The Drontheim" by Dónal MacPolin and Bruckless Harbour from the Lawrence Collection taken from "Killaghtee; People; Places; Past and Present". The photo of Peadar Ó Beirn on Page 21, I got from Pat Gillespie, An Baile Mór, Teileann and Mick Browne, Teach Tom, An Charraig.

Seosamh Ua Gallchobhair,

joegalla@eircom.net

Rinn na Cille,

Teileann,

Tir Chonaill.

14/032006

BRUCKLESS THE GREAT DROWNING.

Ever since the year 1813, a melancholy interest attaches to Bruckless Bay, in consequence of the large number of fishermen drowned there in the February of that year. Bruckless was at that period noted for its herring fisheries, and gave employment to fishermen from all parts of the country. On the evening of that fatal night many a boat's crew set out in joyous expectation to shoot their nets, but few, very few, returned. Next morning the shore was bestrewn with the corpses of the ill-fated fishermen, and the sea all round was covered with the floating *debris* of their gallant crafts. Oars, spars, nets, sails, kegs, dead herrings, and the shattered timbers of their broken boats, floated promiscuously on the surging tide. It was a day of wailing and lamentation. It was a harrowing spectacle to behold desolate widows, and bereaved mothers, and sorrowing daughters, and weeping sisters, and disconsolate maidens, arriving from all parts of the country, and moving among the long array of lifeless corpses, staring wildly into the features of the dead to ascertain, if possible, whether the inert mass which now riveted their gaze was ever addressed by them with the endearing appellation of husband, or son, or father, or brother, or lover. The greatest loss of life appears to have been among the fishermen of Kilcar, Teelin, and Malinbeg; and there is scarcely a family of them to this day that does not refer to the great drowning of Bruckless, for the loss of some one of their number, whose memory, even now, they fondly and dearly cherish. In fact, "The great drowning at Bruckless" is constantly referred to as marking an important epoch in the local annals.

There are some to be met with who ascribe this dread catastrophe to the incantations of an old witch---

"The foul witch, Sycorax, who, with age and envy,
Was grown into a hoop."

She entertained spiteful feelings towards the fishermen, and thereon determined to execute vengeance. She is represented as having been a wandering stranger, who came to Bruckless during the fishery, as many others of her station in life did, to profit by the generosity of the fishermen. She was in the habit of visiting the boat-port every morning regularly, to ask for her *gallagh*, or dole of herrings. This all the fishermen cheerfully contributed for a length of time, but ultimately, from force of habit, her demand appeared to the hard-wrought seamen to assume the form of an exaction. By common sentiment she was voted a bore, and the fishermen passed a resolution not to submit to her taxing tyrannies any longer. For this the old crone vowed vengeance unutterable against the whole fleet. She ordered a little neighbour girl to take in a basin of water; which, being done, she set a *coppa* or wooden bowl floating on the top. Then going out to commence her sorceries, she directed the little girl to watch the movements of the water. After being a while engaged in her hell-inspired ceremonies, she inquired of the girl inside if she observed any movements in the basin. The latter replied that air-bubbles were ascending to the surface, and that the water was becoming agitated. She then proceeded with her incantations, and after a little while repeated her former question. The reply was that the water was in a raging boil. Continuing her magic rites, she soon after put the query a third time regarding appearances in the basin, and was informed that the violent agitation of the water had turned the *coppa* bottom upwards. "All right! I am now happy!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands with hellish glee. At this moment the storm was first heard to rage, and the ocean was observed to whiten with foam; and tomorrow's dawn revealed to every eye the too-potent efficacy of the witch's diabolic sorceries.

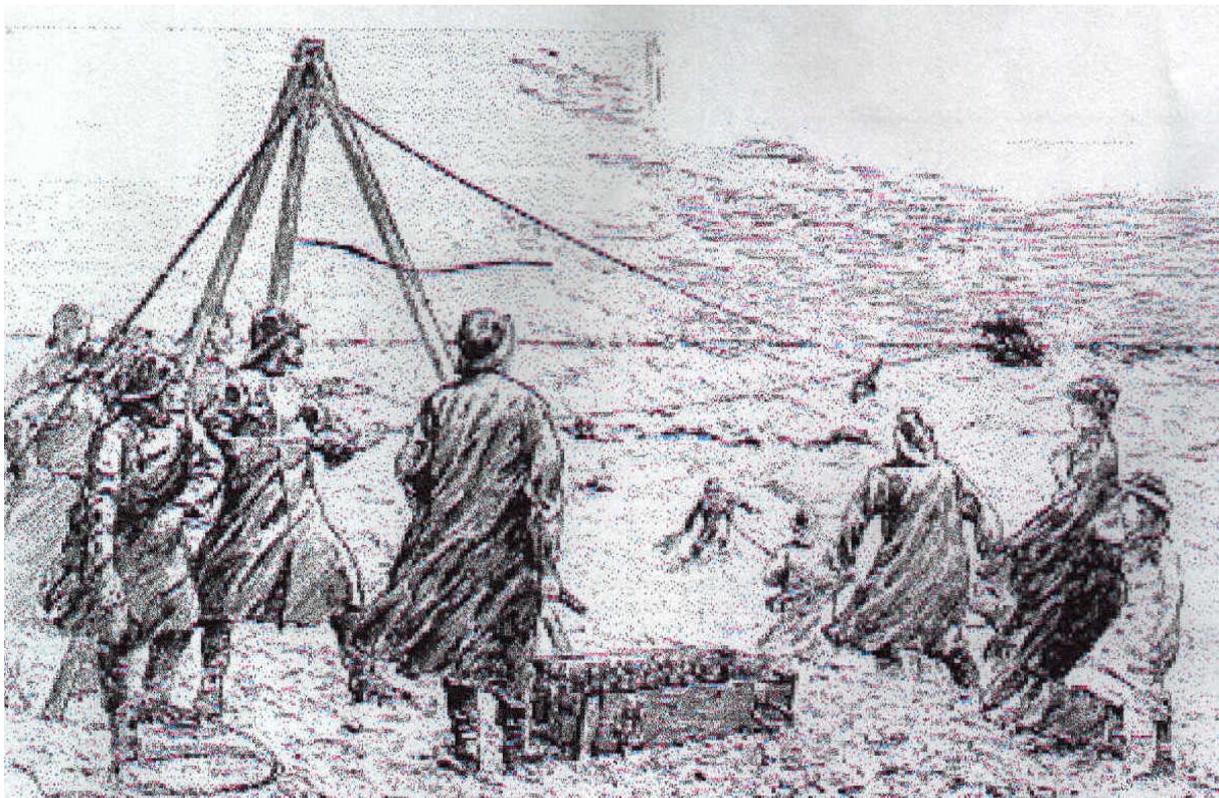
"The sky it seem'd would pour down stinking pitch,
 But that the sea, mounting to the welkin's cheek,
 Did dash the fire out. Oh! I have suffer'd
 With those that I saw suffer! Gallant crafts

Which had, no doubt, some noble creatures in them,
 Dash'd all to pieces. Oh! the cry did knock
 Against my very heart! Poor souls! they perish'd.
 Had I been any god of power, I would
 Have sunk the sea within the earth, before
 It should the good boats so have swallow'd, and
 The freighting souls within them."

That morning the witch was nowhere to be seen. Having vented her bursting spite,
 she hastened away from Bruckless, never to return.

"This damn'd witch, Sycorax,
 For mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible
 To enter human hearing, from this place
 For e'er was banish'd."

Taken from "The Cliff-Scenery of South-Western Donegal" by Thomas Colin McGinley
 (Kinnfaela) 1867. Republished by the Four Masters Press in 2000. I got the text from
 Mícheál Ó Cuinneagáin, An Charraig Uachtarach.



NOTES ON THOMAS COLIN MCGINLEY'S ACCOUNT OF THE DROWNINGS

The Great Bruckless Drowning, February 8th 1813. According to The People's Press account of the tragedy (dated 08/02/1936), between 300 and 500 fishermen were lost. (Another version of the story tells that when the fishermen refused the "witch" fish, one man showed her kindness and she bade him not to go to sea that night, which he didn't. This may be one reason the superstitious fisher folk later accused her of Sorcery). Feach fosta Teacs 17 (c. 5) Leath. 274-276 i n"Gaeilge Theilinn" le Heinrich Wagner. The name of the "witch" was Biddy Devenney. After the Drownings, Biddy had to leave the area.(The late Conal (Dorby) McShane of Teelin had a good account of the Drownings. I heard Conall say "there were 90 widows on both sides of Teelin Bay because of the Drownings". Ins an Leabhar "Pobal na Gaeltachta" ar Leath. 252, Caibideal *Cill Carthaigh*, tá tagairt ag Micheal Ó Domhnaill & "Bathadh Prochlais". Deir sé gur báthadh 48/9 iascairí as Cill Carthaigh agus go bh-fuil siad curtha i Sean-reilig Naomh Carthaigh i m-Baile an Teampaill. Fosta, deir Míchéal gur ar an 16ú Nodlaig 1815 a tharla an báthadh. The "Sycorax" poem (three quotations) are from "The Tempest", Act 1, Scene 2, by William Shakespeare. There is a piece of music in Teelin about the Drownings: "Báthadh Prochlais" (the Bruckless Drownings). I have a copy on tape, lilted by the late Peadar Ó Beirn (Peadar Johnnie Jondy), Teileann. Peadar claimed that a piper could be heard playing the tune while the Disaster was happening. (See Peadar's full account on Pages 28-30)

The above is an extract from the Notes I made on "The Cliff-Scenery of South-Western Donegal" by Thomas Cohn McGinley (Kinnfaela).



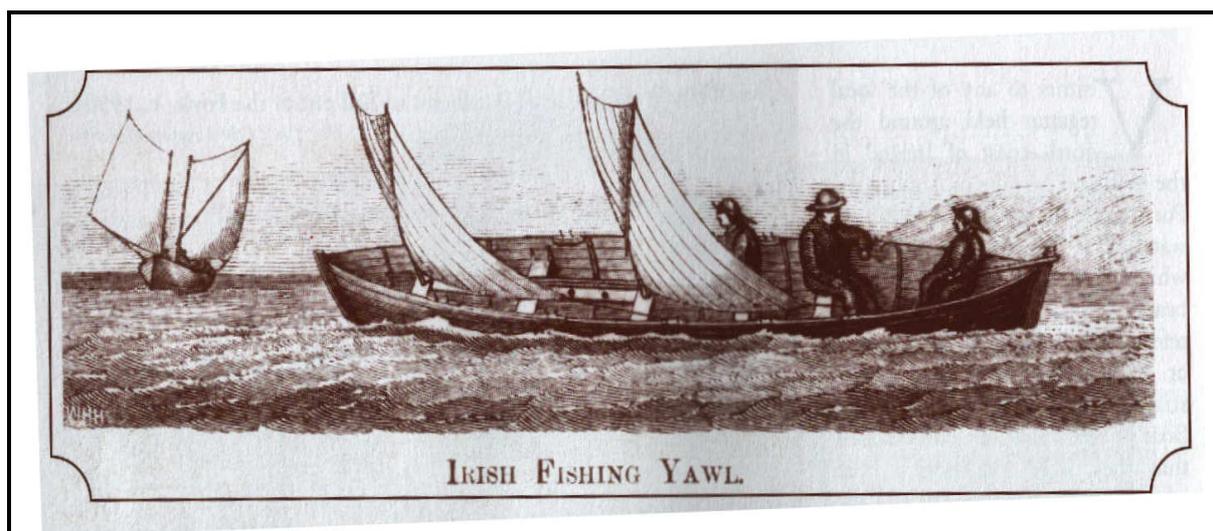
I found the above image on the Internet. S.Ó.G.

BRUCKLESS TRAGEDY

THE PEOPLES PRESS February 8th 1938

A LOCAL LEGEND RETOLD

To the inhabitants of Bruckless the month of February recalls sad and tender memories of a terrible drowning disaster which took place on Bruckless' Bay on February 8th 1813 exactly 123 years ago. It was estimated that from 300 to 500 fishermen lost their lives. During February of that year a very large herring fishing was going on in Bruckless and the awful tragedy is stated to have been caused by an old woman named Bidy Devenney, who lived at Bruckless. During the fishing, men came from Donegal, Inver., Ardara, Teelin and St Johns Point to partake in the fishing and for weeks these men put out to sea each evening in their small crafts, landing in the morning with herring. Each morning as the fishermen landed Bidy demanded and received a quantity of fish from each boat. On the morning of February 8th the fishermen refused to give Bidy her quantity of fish and she left swearing vengeance on the fishermen. That night the fishermen put out to sea as usual. Not a ripple disturbed the surface of the sea as the fishermen left. When Bidy saw from her own house the fishermen leaving she ordered a little girl, who was staying with her to bring her a tub which she filled with water. In this she placed a small wooden basin. After a few moments the water in the tub began to get slightly agitated and the little girl informed Bidy that a storm was rising and rain was falling. Later when the wooden basin was tumbling from side to side in the tub, the little girl informed her that the boats were tossing about the bay. After a few moments the basin tumbled upside down in the tub and the little girl told her that a terrific storm was raging and that no boats were anywhere to be seen. To this Bidy replied "I am now satisfied my work is done". Next morning the shore was strewn with the dead bodies of the fishermen. Bidy vanished and was never seen again. This tale is even yet related around many a fireside in the Bruckless area



The above image is from "The Drontheim" by Dónal MacPolin.

**Cuntas ar Bháthadh Phroclaise
as Teileann
Tógtha as “Gaeilge Theilinn”
le Heinrich Wagner**

Téacs 17 (c. 5).

Seo an báthadh ba mhó a bhí annseo ariamh, báthadh ‘Phroclaise’. Bhí céad baintreach na dhéi gan trácht ar an méid buachaillí óga a báitheadh. Agus siúd an dóigh a dtainig an báthadh:

Bhí sean-bhean phisreógach agus a nighean, bhí siad a rathaidh fan chladach a cruinniú scadán eadar na bádaí, agus chaith dhine ínteach dona hiascairí madadh garbh insa chloigeann orthaí lá amháin, agus dubhairt sí gur dhaor a cheannochar siad sin.

Chuaidh sí suas insa teach bheag a bhí aici, agus thug sí léithe lán tobáin de uisce, agus chuir sí scála édhmaid isteach sa tobán. Níor thúsaigh sí ar a cuid léightheóireacht go rabh na heangachaí curtha aig na bádaí, agus thúsaigh sí sin ar a cuid ‘rime’-annaí, agus d’iarr sí ar a nighean, ‘gabh síos’, arsa sheise, ‘fhad leis an tobán, agus amharc’, arsa sheise, ‘goidé mar’s tá an scála na luighe insa tobán’, arsa sheise. ‘Tá sé na luighe’, arsa’n nighean ‘go han-socair astoigh sa tobán.’ Thúsaigh sí ar a cuid rantaí araís, agus d’iarr sí ar a nighean dhul síos an dara huair. ‘Goidé mar’s tá sé anois insa tobán?’ arsa sheise. ‘Táthar á bhriseadh thall ’s i bhfus ar dhá thaoibh an tobáin’, arsa sheise. Thúsaigh sí ar a cuid rantaí an tríomhú huair, agus d’iarr sí ar a nighean a dhul síos agus amharc goidé mar’s tá an scála insa tobán. ‘Tá béal an scála tionntoighthe faoi astoigh sa tobán.’ ‘Tá an báthadh déanta anois’, arsa sheise, ‘agus bí muid sinne ag imtheacht!’ D’imthigh an tsean-chailleach agus ní fheacthas thíos ná thuas ca dteachaigh sí ach bhí siad a déanamh amach gub í ba chionntuighthe leis an bháthadh a dhéanamh i bProclaise. An oidhche sin, bhí céad baintreach ann, agus cupla céad de bhuchaillí óga (báidhte).

Bhí dhá bhuchaillí ghálta insa bháthadh, agus d’iarr a maithir ar an fhear a dhul soir go dtugad sí isteach na stócaigh

a bhí báidhte, agus d'fhiafruigh a fear dacoithe goidé an dóigh a dtig léithe a dtabhairt isteach, agus dubhairt seise go dtabharfad sí isteach iad. Chuaidh sí héin agus a fear soir lá thar-namhárach i n-áit a dteárnadh an báthadh, agus chuaidh sí a léightheóireacht leabhar pisreógach a bhí aici, agus thug sí a dhá mac isteach 'na chladaigh, agus thug siad leofa iad gur chuir siad iad ina roilig thíos insna Cealla.

NÓTA: Deir Máire Ní Beirn (2) go rabh plóbaire a seinm ar an tráigh nuair a bhí an báthadh a dul. (1813 a thárluigh sin). Deir P.M.S. go gcuala sé go minic ag an tsean-bhunadh go bhfacaigh cuid de na foirneacha an tsean-chailleach a marcaidheacht ar chionn na n-eangach sula dteárnadh an báthadh.



“WEEPING WOMEN” BY ROCKWELL KENT.

SLIOCHT AS ALT A SCRÍOBH MÍCHÉAL Ó DOMHNAILL AS CHILL CHARTHACH .

FEACH LEATH.252 I “POBAL NA GAELTACHTA”.

Dar ndóigh, níor imigh iascairí na farráige ón tubaiste ach oiread leo siúd a bhí ar bhruacha na n-aibhneacha. Is dócha gurbh é an taisme farráige ba mhó a raibh baint aige le Cill Charthaigh, háthadh Bhroclais, a tharla ar an 16ú Nollaig 1815. Bhí céad fiche bád as Cill Charthaigh agus as Teileann ag iascaireacht an oíche sin i mBá Bhroclais agus an cuan lán scadán. Lean na bádaí an t-iasc amach i dtreo Fhionntrá agus tháinig stoim orthu go han-tobann. Cailleadh daichead a hocht nó a naoi de chuid iascairí Chill Charthaigh an oíche sin. Tugadh na coirp isteach ar charranna agus cuireadh iad i seanreilig Naomh Carthaigh i mBaile an Teampaill. Tháinig bád amháin slán ar an ábhar gur chroch an fhoireann na heangacha amach ar thaobhanna an bháid.

Below is an extract from “GLENCOLUMBKILLE 3000BC—1901AD by Aidan Manning on Page 105 in which he mentions the Bruckless Drownings.

Danger was a constant companion for offshore fishermen in Donegal Bay. The disaster that most affected the parish was the one of 12 February 1814, when 20 boats and 43 men from Teelin and Malinbeg were lost near Bruckless. The Ballyshannon Herald of 2 February 1838, reported that on Monday last, “seven men were lost off Teelin, all belonging to the place”. That same day, five Killybegs fishermen were lost off Muckcross. A week later, 32 boats were lost just outside Killybegs harbour, but all the fishermen survived.

Commanders of the wind

WE have been plagued of late by sudden storms that have caused much havoc over land and sea. Meteorologists explain them all away with talk of isobars and pressure variations, and summon up the ghosts of Coriolis, Beaufort and Buys Ballot to support their theories. But could there be forces much more sinister at work? There are times, it seems, when the laws of nature are suspended, and the weather may respond to sorcery of a kind that Omar Khayyám envisaged in his *Rubaiyat*:

*For in and out, above, about,
below,*

*'Tis nothing but a Magic
Shadow-show,*

*Played in a Box whose
Candle is the sun,*

*Round which we Phantom
Figures come and go.*

In times gone by it was known that certain people had the power to summon up the winds by magic. Witches were a case in point; along with their many other spiteful talents, they had developed the science of weather modification to a fine art, being able to raise hailstorms, conjure up tempests, and command thunder and lightning to appear with the merest twitch of a magic broomstick. But other legendary characters also had useful talents of this kind.

Sir Walter Scott was a keen chronicler of such curiosities. In his novel, *The Pirate*, he

tells us about a Scandinavian king in olden times called Eric, nicknamed "Windy Cap", who was able to change the direction of the wind merely by turning his cap around upon his head.

Indeed, northerners in general were regarded with some suspicion in this regard: as late as the middle of the last century, captains of vessels burdened with persistent head-winds were keen to discover the presence of a Russian or a Finn among the crew who could be blamed for the misfortune and clapped in irons until the wind eventually changed.

Scott also documents the expertise of one Bessie Miller who lived at Stromness in the Orkneys around the beginning of the 19th century. Bessie, it seems, would sell a favourable wind to anyone who asked. "Her fee was extremely moderate being exactly sixpence, for which, as she explained herself, she boiled the kettle, and gave the bark the advantage of her prayers; the wind thus petitioned for was sure to come, she said — although occasionally the mariner had to wait some time for it."

And it may well have been Bessie Miller who provided the model for the most flamboyant character in *The Pirate* — that of the quaintly named Norna of the Fitful Head, who also professed to be able to control the winds.

Brendan McWilliams

A DONEGAL MEMORY
THE GREAT DROWNING AT BRUCKLESS BAY
1813
PART ONE

I

Just four years before the Dear Summer¹
 In the year Eighteen Hundred and Thirteen,
 And thirty-two years ere the Blight on
 Potatoes in Ireland was seen.

II

Off the Western shores of Tyrconnell,
 Where headlands afar in the sea,
 Guard each Bay as the arms of a mother,
 Her tender, young babe on her knee.

III

There occurred what is called "The Great Drowning",
 In a place that is named Bruckless Bay,
 And, sure, in the Annals of Sorrow,
 There is nothing to match it, they say.

IV

It was in the beginning of Springtime,
 In the second month of the year,
 The Fishermen gathered to Bruckless,
 With stout boats and good fishing gear.

V

To take in the great herring harvest
 The fishermen came near and far,
 `Round the western shores of Tyrconnell,
 But the most of them came from Kilcar.

VI

The evening before the Disaster,
 The men were as busy as bees,
 Whilst the sound of their song and their laughter
 Arose on the brine-laden breeze.

VII

And many a story and legend
 Were told in the Old Gaelic Tongue,
 And many a sweet tune was lilted,
 And many a Gaelic Song sung.

VII

"Stop your singing" says Big Briany Backagh
 To his neighbour, young Neddy John Óig,
 "Don't you hear the Wild Caoine beyont there
 In Phelemy Norah's oul' bog".

IX

Now all hold their breath and they listen,
 And there, sir, as sure as I tell,
 The dolefullest Caoine e'er uttered,
 Rings out over mountain and dale.

X

And now to a sighing and moaning,
 It mournfully falls by degrees,
 Like the sound of a soft breeze blowing,
 In Summer, through green leafy trees.

XI

Again it rings out o'er the mountain,
 Heart-rending, loud, piercing and shrill,
 Like the wail of the widow and orphan,
 Oft heard on famed Oulart Hill².

XII

Then dying afar in the distance
 The Caoine no longer was heard,
 Whilst the people stood Blessing and Crossing
 Themselves without speaking a word.

XIII

"The Banshee" exclaimed Eamon Neddy,
 And he said to young Fardy³ O'Friel;
 "I'm afraid there is trouble before us"
 "Arrah nonsense" says Cormac Caol.

XIV

"Aye nonsense" says Manus na Mairteen,
 "Away with your pisreogach spell.
 Sure the sky is now clear and uncloudy
 And the bay is as calm as a well".

XV

"Come over here oul' Neddy Ciotach,
 Len' a han' 'till we get under way,
 Sure the fishermen over from Teelin
 Are shooting their nets in the Bay"

XVI

Then all hands again became merry,
 They lilted a song as before
 And with hope and glad expectation,
 The Fishing Fleet shot from the shore.

XVII

Rash mortals to heed not the warning--
 The good Banshee's sorrowful call;
 Even now for you, death is preparing--
 A dark dripping watery pall.

XVIII

'Tis midnight; the face of the water
 But lately, as calm as a well,
 Begins to boil and to bubble,
 As if by some magical spell.

XIX

And wave after wave rush onwards,
 As higher and higher they rise--
 Loud earth-shaking thunder peals rattle
 And the fiery bolts cleave the dark skies.

XX

The deep, stifled moans of men drowning
 Are borne on the hurricane's wing,
 Whilst each stout boat is tossed in the Tempest
 Like a paper kite cut from the string.

XXI

Lament now, ye orphans and widows.
 Ye fair maids, oh, well may ye mourn,
 Nor father, nor husband, nor lover,
 To your arms shall ever return.

XXII

'Tis morning; the Great Storm is over,
 But, oh, what a heart-rending scene,
 All around the old Bay of Bruckless
 On the corpse-strewn Claddagh is seen.

XXIII

The wailing and sad lamentation
 Of widows and orphans arise,
 As they `mid the terrible wreckage
 Each pale, beloved face, recognise.

XXIV

One hundred poor heart-broken widows,
 With fathers and mothers galore,
 Lamented the loss of their loved ones,
 That day on the corpse-strewn shore.

PART TWO⁴

This Chapter deals with cause of 'the "Great Drowning"' and how it was brought about?

XXV

The old people yet tell the story,
 How a withered, old, wrinkle-faced dame,
 From the heart of the Heilens of Scotland,
 Awandering to Bruckless Bay came.

XXVI

At first she was looked on with pity
 And treated most kindly by all.
 For the wanderer ever finds refuge
 With the peasants of kind Donegal.

XXVII

But at length she grew bold and annoying;
 She now wouldn't beg but demand,
 A "Gallagh" of herring each morning
 From each fisherman down on the strand.

XXVIII

She threatened destruction and ruin
 And said that the chief of her Clan,
 Would punish them all at her bidding
 If they didn't comply to a man.

XXIX

So, the morning before the "The Great Drowning",
 The fishermen met on the shore
 And there, made a strong resolution
 To yield to her tyranny no more.

XXX

Then off to the cot on the mountain
That stands overlooking the bay.
Muttering foul maledictions on their heads,
The old Hag took her way.

XXXI

This cottage belonged to a widow,
This night she was absent from home.
And her one only child, little Nancy,
Was glad to see somebody come.

XXXII

The hag spent the night telling stories
"Till midnight, beside the turf fire.
"Now" she says "I have something to show you
Before that to bed you retire".

XXXIII

Wee Nancy, now tired and weary
And fain to her bed would she go.
Stood wondering and eagerly waiting
To see what the Hag had to show.

XXXIV

"Now bring me a basin of water
And bring me the wee wooden dish".
This done, she put into basin
A queer-looking three-headed fish.

XXXV

Said she, "now the basin 's the Ocean
And the little Cupán 's a boat"
So saying, she set the wee Cupán
In the basin of water afloat.

XXXVI

Wee Nancy, now full of amazement,
Looked up at the Hag in surprise
And to her alarm she noticed
A strange looking stare in her eyes.

XXXVII

Then walking three times round the basin
Which sat on the old earthen floor.
And muttering something above it,
The Hag disappeared through the door.

XXXVIII

Outside, amid the thunder and lightning
 With many a charm and spell
 And manoeuvres, the strangest e'er witnessed
 The Hag to her evil work fell.

XXXIX

*Now in listening attitude stooping,
 With eagerness stamped on her brow,
 She called to wee Nancy from outside
 Saying "How does the Ocean look now".*

XXXX

*Wee Nancy all wonder made answer
 And thus to the Cailleach did say.
 "The basin is covered with bubbles,
 Like a pool on a big rainy day".*

XXXXI

*Then cutting the queerest of capers
 In the air with her long skinny arms
 And moving around in a circle,
 The Cailleach continued her charms.*

XXXII

*Heedless of thunder and lightning,
 The darkness and downpouring rain.
 "Is there any change on our Ocean"
 She shouted to Nancy again.*

XXXIII

*Said Nancy "It's bulging and boiling
 Like a big mountain river in flood.
 The Cupán is leaping and tossing
 And the water 's the colour of blood*

XXXIV

*A third time she tried her manoeuvres,
 Still muttering and moving about
 "Is there any change on our Ocean"
 A third time the Cailleach did shout*

XXXV

*"It is now overflowing the basin
 Like the breakers beyond on Tramore,
 And the basin itself now is moving
 Like some living thing on the floor".*

XXXXVI

*"There's moaning deep down at the bottom
Like some human creatur in pain.
The Cupán 's capsized in the basin"
Replies the wee Caileen again.*

XXXXVII

*Said the Cailleach 'At last I have conquered,
My enemies now are laid low.
Oh sweet are the successful reprisals
Though dearly they're bought down below".*

XXXXVIII

*A bright flash of lightning now entered
The door that still lay opened wide.
And revealed to the terrified Caileen
Legions of Demons outside.*

XXXXIX

*All passing around the old Cailleach
Who stood in the midst of the throng.
"Come with me you old Hag " said their leader
"In future to me you belong".*

XXXXX

*Just then a loud note from the byre
Was sounded by bold Chanticleer⁵,
Which was a true signal that witches
And demons must all disappear.*

XXXXXI

*And there was the row and the tussle,
For the Hag did her best to remain.
But Satan held fast to his victim
And led her away on a chain.*

XXXXXII

*A wail of despair from the Cailleach
Rang out over mountain and bay.
And then in a flood of blue blazes
The whole of them vanished away.*

XXXXXIII

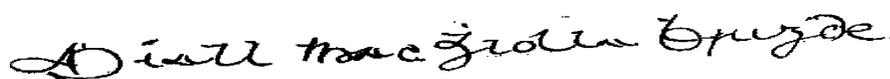
*Wee Nancy no longer could stand it,
But fainted away with the fright
And when she revived, she was lying
Alone in the depth of the night.*

XXXXXIV

*And there lay the basin---now empty
 And there lay the wee wooden dish.
 But where was the wicked old Cailleach?
 And where was the queer looking fish?
 Aye, where was the Cailleach and fish?
 Echo Answers---Whirl!*

XXXXXV

*Now that's the whole tale as I heard it
 From an old woman long years ago.
 And she had the story from Nancy
 Who witnessed the Witchcrafty Show.*



Recently I received another Photocopy of the Poem "*The Great Drowning at Bruckless in 1813*" from Diarmuid MacSeáin in Castlebar, Co. Mayo. It contains 55 verses in clear handwriting. The verses in Italics are the extra ones in Diarmuid's version. Diarmuid's version had a signature attached. I am mystified by the name, Níall MacGhiolla Brighde. There was a Poet of this name in Creeslough, born 31/10/1861—died Sept.1942? He was a friend of Pádraig MacPiarais and President Dubhglas de h-Íde (An Chraoibhinn Aoibhinn). He wrote the Gaelic poems "*An Trucaillín Donn*" and '*Mo Chró Bheag fá Bhun Chnoc a' Tighe*'; a book of poems called "*Blatha Fraoich*" in 1905; a poem in English about the killing of Lord Leitrim in Cratlagh Woods and "*The Hills of Donegal*". He also dictated his Autobiography to Liam Ua Connacháin. See also Pages 359-362 in "*Ó Ghleann go Fánaid*" by Pádraig Ó Baoighill. Could it be this man? (I notice that there is a "fada" on the "i" in Níall; this is also how Níall is spelt in my copy of the book of poems "*Blatha Fraoich*" mentioned above).

I have studied the two versions of the Poem and I made small adjustments.

26/09/2006. Three weeks ago when I was visiting Falcarragh, I called into MacNulty's Bar in Craoslach. There, I met Síle MacNulty and I mentioned my interest in Níall Mac Giolla Brighde and his poetry and I gave her a copy of "*A Donegal Memory, The Great Bruckless Drowning at Bruckless Bay in 1813*" and a copy of Níall's handwriting and signature. She gave me a copy of "*An Trucaillín Donn*" and she took me out to An Fiodh Mór to view the Níall Mac Giolla Brighde cottage. She told me that her son, John had organised a commemoration last year of the famous court trial and conviction of Níall for having his name displayed in Gaelic on his cart. I rang John MacNulty today and he confirmed to me that the Poem, "*A Donegal Memory, The Great Bruckless Drowning at Bruckless Bay in 1813*" was indeed written by Níall and that the both handwriting and signature were his. The Poem was published in the "Derry Journal" on the 12th July 1935 and there is a copy on microfilm in the Donegal Library, Letterkenny. John MacNulty says that Níall got the story from a travelling woman who got it from "Nancy"

Seosamh Ua Gallchobhair.

NOTES

The Famine was over for some time when the Poem was written. Part One gives a good account of the evening before the Disaster, the "Banshee" episode excepted.

1. Dear Summer: This was the Summer of 1817. For an account of it see Pages 86-87 in "The Cliff Scenery of South-Western Donegal" by Thomas Colin McGinley/Kinnfaela.

2. Oulart Hill: Site of a Battle in Co. Wexford in 1798.

The battle on Oulart Hill on Whit Sunday 27th May 1798 is regarded as being one of the most influential victories of the 1798 Risings. The North Cork Militia was nearly wiped out, only five of 110 survived. Six United Irishmen lost their lives on the field of battle that day. (The North Cork Militia were Irish as well.)

3. Fardy: This may be short for Feardorcha?

4. Part Two: The legend in Part Two is similar to other versions of the story.

5. Chanticleer: A cock, especially in Fairy Tales!

Seosamh Ua Gallchobhair,
"An Sean Chéidh",
Rinn na Cille,
Teileann,
Tir Chonaill.
06/02/2005

A MIGRATORY TALE

On my recent sojourn in Dublin, Rónan Galvin brought me into the Folklore Department in UCD. There I met Rionach Uí h-Ógáin, Daithe Ó h-Ógáin and Criostóir Mac Cárthaigh. I discussed my Bruckless Drownings project with them. Criostóir told me that the story of the “Ship-Sinking Witch” was an ancient Migratory Tale that is over 2000 years old. Criostóir gave me a copy of an article of his that was published in *Bealoideas* Vol.60-11992-3. The name of the article is THE SHIP- SINKING WITCH. Below are some selections from the article.

THE SHIP-SINKING WITCH

A maritime folk legend from north-west Europe

CRÍOSTÓIR MAC CARTHAIGH

The twin concepts of storm-raising and ship-sinking are of great antiquity, perhaps coinciding with mankind's earliest achievements in the field of water transport. The dramatic opening scene of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is calculated to *exploit* the fascination and fear attaching to the subject in his contemporary audience. The playwright does not dwell on the form of magic adopted by Prospero to drown his victims, but in the Greek *Alexander Romance* (often referred to as *Pseudo-Callisthenes*), composed about a millennium and a half earlier, a ship-sinking rite, performed by Alexander's father, the Egyptian pharaoh Nectanebus, is described in some detail. Faced with an overwhelming force of barbarians about to overrun Egypt, Nectanebus filled a bowl with spring water: and with his hands [he] moulded ships and men of wax, and placed them in the bowl. Then he robed himself in the princely robe of a prophet and took an ebony staff in his hand. Standing erect, he called on the so-called gods of spells and the airy spirits and demons below the earth, and by the spell the wax figures came to life. Then he sank the ships in the bowl, and straightaway, as they sank, so the ships of the enemy who were coming against him perished

In more recent times, an almost identical form of sympathetic magic forms the central motif of a migratory legend recorded in several coastal districts of northern and

¹ Quoted from R. Stonernan's translation, *The Greek Alexander Romance* 1 : 1(pp. 35-6), Harmondsworth 1991. I am indebted to Bo Almqvist for drawing my attention to this, and to a number of other relevant texts.

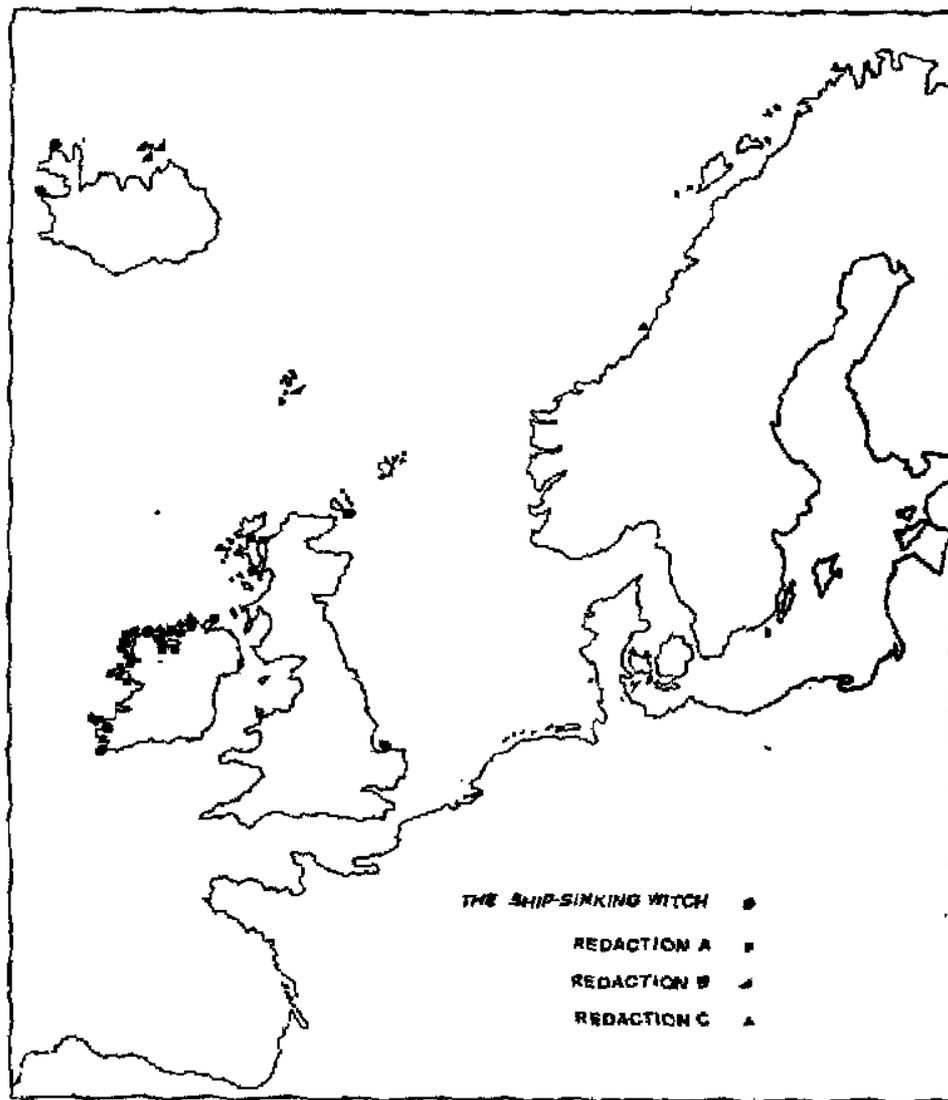


Fig. 1: The Ship-sinking Witch. Redaction A, B and C.

THE SHIP-SINKING WITCH

269

northwestern Europe (see Fig. 1 on next page).²

In 1933) a correspondent in Mac Swyne's Bay, County Donegal, responding to a feature in an Irish national newspaper, recalling a very violent storm in the year 1825, wrote of the drowning of a large number of fishermen during this tempest:

One morning, when the fishermen were disposing of their catch to the buyers, an old woman, who had the reputation of being a witch, approached them and demanded some fish for her midday meal. The men refused, and she returned home swearing that she would make them regret their meanness.

That night, when all the boats had put out to sea, the woman was seen performing strange rites outside her cottage. Before her stood a bowl of water, on the surface of which several feathers were floating. As she stirred up the water in the bowl a great storm arose out at sea. The feathers in the bowl soon became waterlogged and sank to the bottom. All that night the storm raged, and the next morning the shore was strewn with the bodies of the drowned fishermen. The relatives of the men attributed the gale to the evil rites of a witch, but when they went to search for the old woman she had gone.

This is the story as it was told to me by an old man, who was told it by his father, who was a friend of the man who saw the woman performing the rites; and, although we may not believe the story, there was never a herring caught in MacSwyne's Bay since.³

Though differing in certain details, the form of sympathetic magic employed in the rite is essentially the same as that used by Nectanebus some two thousand years before. The more usual object employed to imitate a ship at sea in Irish, and in certain Scottish variants of this legend, is a wooden bowl, while the majority of Scandinavian, and the remainder of the Scottish variants, favour the use of a sea-shell. Often, the motion of heavy seas is imitated by stirring, and by blowing on the water, to simulate gale conditions. In addition to this the performer may accompany the rite with magical formulae.

A variety of plots serve as a vehicle for the expression of the motif, yet among all of these a number of distinct *redactions* of the legend can be identified. In *Redaction A*, which is best represented in Ireland, a certain woman, skilled in the Black Art, is denied a favour, in the form of alms or material assistance (see the Donegal variant quoted); or this woman's daughter is unfairly treated.⁴ *Redaction B* concerns the sovereignty and safekeeping of vulnerable maritime communities for whose protection, pirates and other enemies at sea are brought to grief by magicians or fairy women. This redaction has been recorded in Iceland, the Faroes, and on the Swedish island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea.⁵ The third redaction - *Redaction C* - bears a marked resemblance to the migratory legend *The Daughter of the Witch* (ML 3035), in which a young girl fatally demonstrates one of a number of skills in the Black Art learned from her mother. This type is common to Ireland, Scotland, Norway and Denmark.⁶

2 A survey of Irish variants of this legend was made in 1976 In a student essay by Séamus Mac Cómhail entitled *The Witch sinks Ships*, in the Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin. The present writer has since added to the number of Irish variants surveyed by Mac Cómhail, and widened the scope of the study to include recordings of the legend from other countries.

3 The Irish Times, 6 March 1998.

NOTES

- 5 Iceland: (1) J. Árnason, *op. cit.*, III, 586. (2) J. Árnason, *op. cit.*, III, 610.
 Faroes: (1) J. Jakobsen, *Færøske Folkesagn og Æventyr*, Copenhagen 1898-1901, 37-42. (An English translation can be found in J. F. West, *Faroese Folk-Tales and Legends*, Lerwick 1980, 43-7.)
 Sweden: Gotland (1) P. A. Sæve, *Svenska Sagor och Sägner*, 12 *Gotländska Sägner*, II, Uppsala 1961, 442. (See J.-Inge Wall, 'Jungfrun med eidhanen, Sägner om trollkvinna som orsak till olycka', *Gotländskt Arkiv* 1992, 175-85, for discussion of the background to this version.) My thanks to Jan-Inge Wall for drawing my attention to and locating several Norwegian and Swedish variants of the legend.
- 6 Ireland: Donegal (1) Diarmaid Mac Seagháin, *An Cheapach Uachtarach*, Teileann, recorded 7 October 1946, IFC 1034: 56-60. (2) Seán 'ac mBriartaigh, *Iomaire Mhuraín, Teileann*, recorded in 1938, *Béalóideas* 8 (1938), 158. (3) Pádraig Mac Seáin, *An Cheapach Uachtarach*, Teileann, date of recording not known, *Béalóideas* 27 (1959), 2-5. A second variant from the same informant can be found in IFC 1034: 56-60, reproduced in *Béalóideas* 33 (1985), 59. Scotland: Argyll (1) J. Gregorson Campbell *Witchcraft and Second Sight in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Glasgow 1902, 22-3. Hebrides (1) *Folk-Lore* 33 (1922), 211. (2) J. McPherson, *Tales of Barra Told by the Caddy*, Edinburgh 1961, 204-5. (See A. Bruford, 'Scottish Gaelic Witch Stories, A Provisional Type-List', *Scottish Studies* 11 (1967), 22-3, Type 7A, for discussion of this redaction and the related legend The Daughter of the Witch, and details of two further versions from the Hebrides recorded by the School of Scottish Studies.)
 Norway: (1) O. Braseth, *Øventyr, Sagn*, Sparbu 1910, 174. (2) Hulda Ruthberg, *Häxprocesser i Norska Finnmarken 1620-1692*, Stockholm 1918, 44-5. Only the first of these two accounts can with any certainty be said to display the characteristics of Redaction C. In the second, the fact that evidence presented at the trial is at pains to stress that the accused learned the Black Art from another woman points in the same direction.
 Denmark: (1) B. Simonsen, *Bidrag til Odense Bues ældre Historie*, Odense 1844, 124-7. A jilted daughter is taught by her mother how to sink her tormentor's boat. A second account of the same incident can be found in *P. Ivoets-Lund, Dagligt Liv i Norden*, VI, Stockholm 1934, 43.
- 5 Iceland: (1) J. Árnason, *op. cit.*, III, 586. (2) J. Árnason, *op. cit.*, III, 610.
 Faroes: (1) J. Jakobsen, *Færøske Folkesagn og Æventyr*, Copenhagen 1898-1901, 37-42. (An English translation can be found in J. F. West, *Faroese Folk-Tales and Legends*, Lerwick 1980, 43-7.)
 Sweden: Gotland (1) P. A. Sæve, *Svenska Sagor och Sägner*, 12 *Gotländska Sägner*, II, Uppsala 1961, 442. (See J.-Inge Wall, 'Jungfrun med eidhanen, Sägner om trollkvinna som orsak till olycka', *Gotländskt Arkiv* 1992, 175-85, for discussion of the background to this version.) My thanks to Jan-Inge Wall for drawing my attention to and locating several Norwegian and Swedish variants of the legend.
- 6 Ireland: Donegal (1) Diarmaid Mac Seagháin, *An Cheapach Uachtarach*, Teileann, recorded 7 October 1946, IFC 1034: 56-60. (2) Seán 'ac mBriartaigh, *Iomaire Mhuraín, Teileann*, recorded in 1938, *Béalóideas* 8 (1938), 158. (3) Pádraig Mac Seáin, *An Cheapach Uachtarach*, Teileann, date of recording not known, *Béalóideas* 27 (1959), 2-5. A second variant from the same informant can be found in IFC 1034: 56-60, reproduced in *Béalóideas* 33 (1985), 59. Scotland: Argyll (1) J. Gregorson Campbell *Witchcraft and Second Sight in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Glasgow 1902, 22-3. Hebrides (1) *Folk-Lore* 33 (1922), 211. (2) J. McPherson, *Tales of Barra Told by the Caddy*, Edinburgh 1961, 204-5. (See A. Bruford, 'Scottish Gaelic Witch Stories, A Provisional Type-List', *Scottish Studies* 11 (1967), 22-3, Type 7A, for discussion of this redaction and the related legend The Daughter of the Witch, and details of two further versions from the Hebrides recorded by the School of Scottish Studies.)
 Norway: (1) O. Braseth, *Øventyr, Sagn*, Sparbu 1910, 174. (2) Hulda Ruthberg, *Häxprocesser i Norska Finnmarken 1620-1692*, Stockholm 1918, 44-5. Only the first of these two accounts can with any certainty be said to display the characteristics of Redaction C. In the second, the fact that evidence presented at the trial is at pains to stress that the accused learned the Black Art from another woman points in the same direction.
 Denmark: (1) B. Simonsen, *Bidrag til Odense Bues ældre Historie*, Odense 1844, 124-7. A jilted daughter is taught by her mother how to sink her tormentor's boat. A second account of the same incident can be found in *P. Ivoets-Lund, Dagligt Liv i Norden*, VI, Stockholm 1934, 43.

CRÍOSTÓIR MAC CARTHAIGH

In one account a fisherman, late arriving at the pier, is left behind by his fellow fishermen who proceed to sea without him. He calls on the assistance of a noted magician who succeeds in capsizing two of the fishing boats by placing a number of mussels, corresponding to the number of boats, in a pool of water and reading over them from a book.¹³ In the second of these a parson attempts to block the arrival of his successor at the parsonage by sinking the appointee's boat, intending to install his own appointee in defiance of the local bishop.¹⁴ The third variant is fragmentary and records only that a certain man caused the capsizing of a post-boat in the year 1870, in western Iceland, the motive apparently arising from a quarrel this man had with another who was said to be on board the boat at the time.¹⁵

The plot in Irish and Scottish variants of this redaction, of which the Donegal variant quoted above is a typical example, revolves around a serious drowning incident with which the legend has been linked. One such incident concerns the loss in a storm of a large number of fishermen from Prucklish, in Mac Swyne's Bay, County Donegal in 1813, an incident also recalled in neighbouring fishing villages and in certain districts on the south of Donegal Bay (see Fig. 1). Invariably, the witch figure at the heart of these stories is an elderly, impoverished widow whose motive for the ship-sinking is that she was refused alms by the fishermen in question. Several other variants of the legend recorded in counties Sligo and Mayo, and in Galway further to the south, possess an identical plot but are not related to the Prucklish incident and apparently are unconnected with any identifiable historical incident. In other recordings from these same counties, while the witch figure remains constant the motive varies: a neighbour fails to fulfil his social obligations to a widow by not partaking in a turf-cutting *meitheal* (working party) arranged on her behalf; a widow's only son loses his position in a certain fishing boat; or a widow's daughter is slighted in some way by a certain fisherman.¹⁶

13 J. Árnason *op. cit.*, 111, 402.

14 *Op. cit.*, 537-8

15 *Op. cit.*, I, 437.

16 See note 4 for details of Mayo (1), Galway (2), Galway (3) and (4).

The redaction is also recorded in Shetland. A beggar woman, incensed at receiving only black wool instead of the better quality white wool as a gift from the Lord of Midbrake's wife, seeks revenge on the woman's husband. She attempts to sink three of his fishing boats by placing three horse mussel shells in a pool and pelting them with stones.¹⁷ Elsewhere in Shetland, the practice of wrecking ships by means of agitating cups in a tub of water is recorded, a feature of Hebridean and Irish variants of the legend. It is not stated whether the ships sunk in this manner are native or foreign, nor is any motive indicated, and the reference may point to the existence or redactions of either A or B type.¹⁸ The redaction is linked in the Hebridean isle of Skye with the drowning in 1671 of Iain Garbh Mac Gille Chaluim (John Maeleod of Raasay) and seventeen others. MacLeod is a figure much celebrated in legend and song in the Hebrides, and there are conflicting accounts of his death, and the witch's motive. Most agree that it was Iain Garbh's own foster-mother who caused his boat to sink; some say because she was induced to commit the act by a neighbouring enemy of Iain Garbh, a Macdonald, others, that it arose out of some words spoken to her in jest. Although it is the foster-mother who performed the actual rite itself; in most variants she is said to have been assisted by a variety of famous witches from various parts of the west of Scotland, who appear in the form of ravens or cats on the doomed ship. Ship-sinking is an activity attributed to many of these witches - such as Doideag from Mull, who is elsewhere linked with the sinking of ships of the Spanish Armada, some one hundred years before. Iain Garbh's reputation as an active persecutor of witches may be the reason why his death has assumed such epic proportions with so many noted witches participating.¹⁹

17 See note 4 for references.

18 G. F. Black, *County Folklore* 3, London 1903, 154-5.

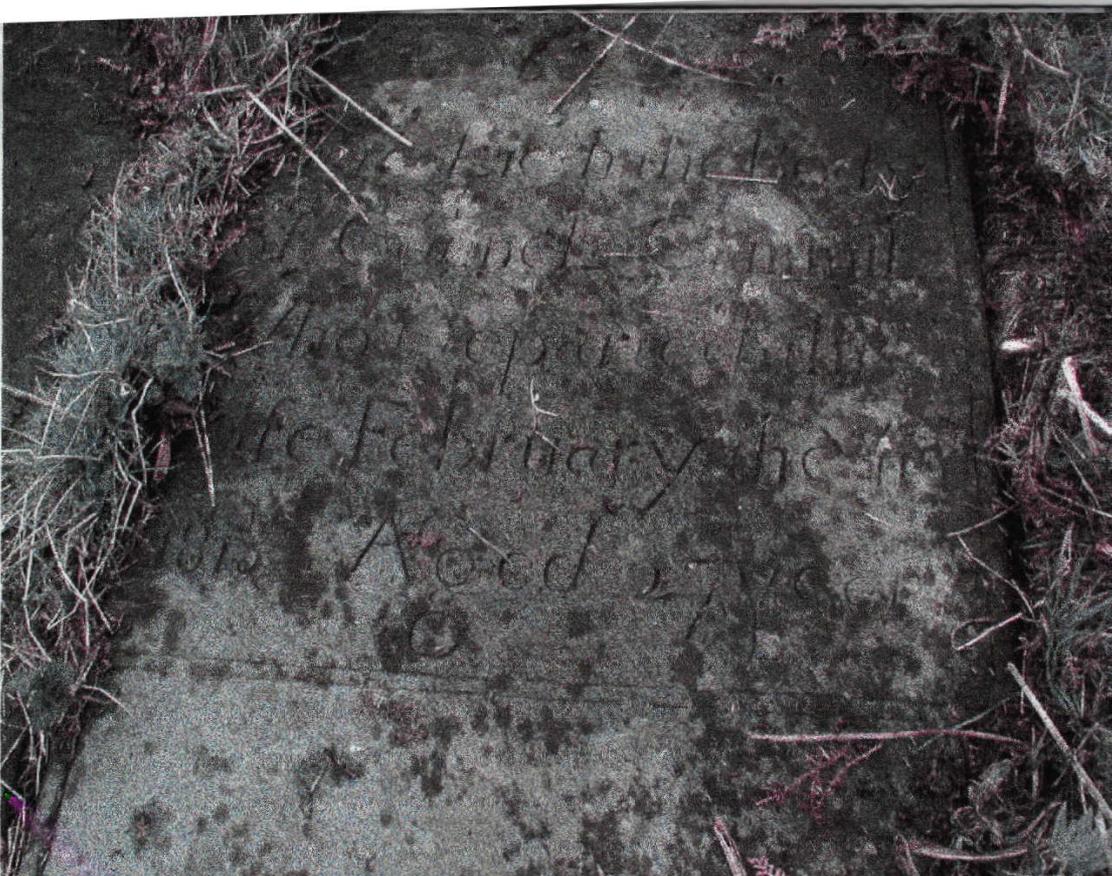
19 See A Bruford, *op. cit.*, 33-5 for discussion of the background to these traditions.

E-MAIL FROM MY COUSIN, KEVIN HAUGHEY, ROXBORO' KILCAR AND
DUBLIN. 17/04/2004

Hello Joe,

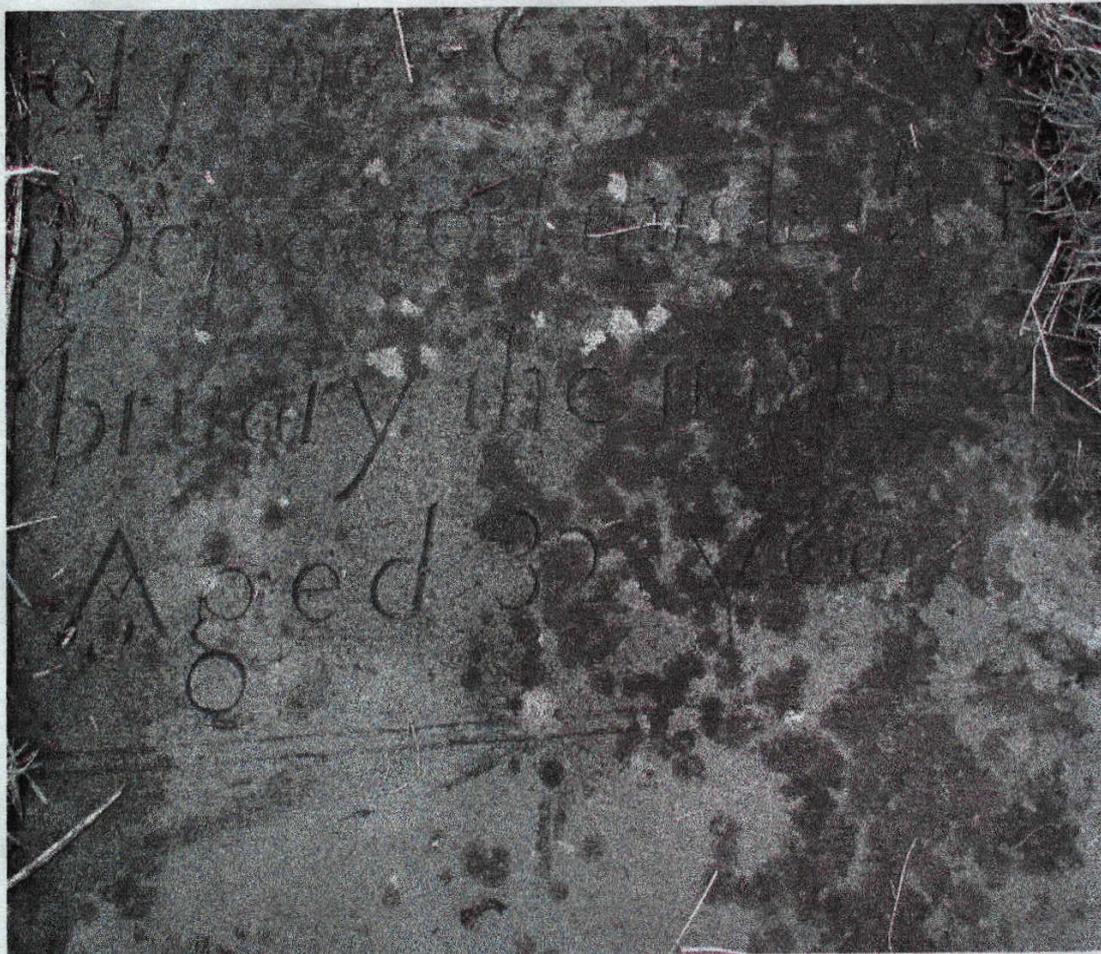
Marie Friedline died in Chicago some years back - she was in her nineties -but she left a lot of genealogical data behind her. A cousin of hers sent me a copy of some of her stuff, and she mentioned that three Campbell brothers died in the 'Big Bruckless Drowning of 1813' - as she put it. That was in fact the first time I had heard of the disaster. Of course I read more about it then in Kinnfaela's account which you have included in your book.

After I left you last weekend, my brother-in-law Sean was having a read through your book and he immediately told me that he was of the opinion that those Campbell brothers, of whom Marie spoke, were buried in the old Churchtown graveyard. So later on Susie & I went to the graveyard to have a look, and sure enough we found two gravestones (slabs) side by side with age and date of death. The writing is still very clear but they were a little overgrown and I cleaned them a little and took photos which I will attach. The inscriptions are as follows: 'Here lieth the body of Connel Cammil who departed this life February the 11 1813 aged 27 years', and also 'Here lieth the body of James Cambel who departed this life February the 11 1813 aged 32 years'. Note the different spellings of the surname - probably different stonemasons involved. Given that they both died on the same day, I think we can assume that they both met their Maker in Bruckless Bay. It may also help to give a more definitive date for the drowning - it's pretty close the date in the People's Press article.
Kevin.



The inscription reads: 'Here lieth the body of Connel Cammil who departed this life February the 11th 1813 aged 27 years'

SECOND CAMPBELL GRAVE



The inscription reads: 'Here lieth the body of James Cambel who departed this life February the 11 1813 aged 32 years'.

The Bruckless Drowning

The story has been repeated many times down through the years of the drowning in Bruckless in 1813.

As the story goes, an old woman named Biddy Devany, who lived in Bruckless, not far from the pier. She was believed to have been a witch. She would go down to the pier every morning expecting to get her string of fish from the fishermen. The fishermen eventually got tired of her ungrateful attitude (rather than ask for the fish, she more or less expected them to contribute) and one morning refused her demands. She became angry and returned to her home. The next morning she got a basin or tub, filled it with water and placed a coopan (bowl) floating on top. She then engaged in some sort of sorcery. The water became agitated and the bowl sank to the bottom. She chanted "They're all gone now". About the same time a storm came up and many boats were lost. It is believed that she cast a spell on the fishermen and caused the drowning. She disappeared and was never seen again after that day.



• Bruckless harbour, 1986. Lawrence collection c1896. Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland. ©

The Great Drowning in Bruckless Bay

Fair Bruckless Bay for many a day
 For fishing was renowned,
 And fisher folk from around the coast
 Came to this famous ground.

The day was fair, as fair could be
 With scarcely any breeze,
 And nothing showed which could portend
 A storm and lashing seas.

The men did smoke and chat and jibe
 About the withered hag
 Who pestered them most every morn
 For herring for her bag

Great shoals of herring appeared in Bruckless Bay in the summer of 1813. This attracted fishermen from Teelin to Inver and beyond to Ballyshannon and to the Sligo coast. On a beautiful day a sudden storm blew up and swamped the boats claiming the lives of 130 men.

171

COLLECTOR PEOPLE, PLACES • PAST AND PRESENT

Locally the catastrophe was attributed to the work of a local women - who was considered a witch- who put a curse on the fishermen when they refused her fish.

As written by the schoolchildren in 1937

BÁTHADH PHROCHLAISC—AN PORT



Le

Peadar Ó Beirn

Mar a d'innis agus a chan sé do Shéamuis Ennis san Bhlian 1949

Sa bhlian 1813 nuair a `bhí iascairí Theilinn ag iascaireacht i m-bádaí beaga; sul a d-táinig bádaí móra nó aon dath eile ó Rialtas na Sasana nó ó thaobh ar bith eile. Ní rabh ann ach a sheoil agus na ceithre mhaide agus `bhí ar na créatúir a bheith i n-gach áit fhad agus `bhí cumhacht nó urradh fear in innibh gabháil ar maide ramha. Agus ní rabh aon áit thart comhgarach do bhaile a rabh dadaidh ag gabháil nach g-caithfidh siad a beith aige le punta a shaoradh.

Ach `tháinig blian amháin mas tá ráite a roimhe agam agus b'éigin díobhtha ghabháil suas `na Phrochlaisc agus tá báidhe shalach ann sin. Ach oidhche amháin de réir mar théid an scéal, nuair a bhí siad ag déanadh réidh le ghabháil `na farraige, `táinig sean-bhean bhig—caithfidh gur pisreógach a `bhí sí. `Tháinig sí thart san áit agus `chuidheadar a bhabadóireacht uirthi agus a dhiabhalaidheacht. Agus `bhí fear amháin a thóg “madadh garbh”¹ nó rud éigin eile agus `chaith sé uirthi é. Ach ní rabh fhios aige cá leis a rabh sé ag uailidheacht². Agus d'iarr fear dá rabh sa chabhloch, orthu, leigeint do'n chréatúir—nach rabh fhios acu cé í féin. Agus nuair a chonnaic sí go rabh níos mó chiall aige ná `bhí ag an chuid eile, `siúl sí anonn fhad leis. “Bhail a ghiolla uaidí, na gabh thusa `na farraige anocht” ar' sise “agus ní beidh tú an dath níos measa leis ar maidin”. Ach `bhí ceathrar na cúigear de chlann ar an iascaireacht agus iad ag siúl le na n-athair in a m-bád féin agus chuidh a chlann a dhéanadh grinn agus laighce³ le n-athair `ghabháil a thabhairt isteach do shean-bhean do'n chinéal i mhaithe le na cuid cainte agus ní rabh gar ann. Nuair a chuir seisean an ug⁴ ann, dúirt sé nach rabh gar ann, nach rachadh sé chun siúil agus d'imigh cuid de chlann, de chrois, amach le bádaí eile.

Ach nuair a `bhí siad crochta amuigh ar na líonta, d'athruigh an oidhche agus níorbh fhada go rabh “Sligh Bhuartha” agus Buarthacht⁶ go tréan san áit chéadna. D'athruigh an oidhche agus d'fás sí comh h-olc agus an chéad bhunadh a rabh a g-cuid líonta tógtha acu, go rabhthar a m-báthadh ar éis mar `bhí siad ag teacht ar an talamh, ach is cosúil go rabh. Nuair a `bhí an eile shórt thart agus an eile shórt críochnaithe suas—`bhí an-ármach⁷ ann agus `bhí cunntas mór céadtaí baintreach i n-diaidh a bháidhte.

Ach i g-cás ar bith, is cosúil go rabh duine éigin eile nach rabh an báthadh ag tabhairt iomlán trioblóide dó agus `chuala siad duine éigin eile—gléas éigin eile ceoil—is dóiche gur píobaire—`bhí sé déanta amach go b'eadh—`bhí gléas éigin eile ceoil ar an chladach agus rinneadh amach gur píobaire a `bhí ann agus is dóiche go b'eadh, siocair gur píobaire a bhíos ag leanstan do'n cinéal seo armaigh agus pisreógaí agus an eile shórt eile de'n chinéal sin. Ach ar cás ar bith `bhí duine éigin eile ann a rabh an túin leis—de dal e dal el...

Sin é Túin “Báthadh Phrochlaisc”.

FOCLÓIR

1. Madadh garbh: spiny dogfish. (Ó Dónaill).
2. Uailidheacht: tormenting is the meaning here.
3. Laighce: banter/jollity. (Ó Dónaill).
4. Ug: doubt; distinction?
5. Sligh buartha: way of sorrow.
6. Buarthacht: lamentations. (“Sligh Buartha agus Buarthacht” : “Way of Sorrow and Lamentations” : Via Dolorosa).
7. An-ármhach: terrible scene of slaughter. (Ó Dónaill and Dinneen).

NÓTAÍ

a. Ar chlé tá pioctúir de Pheadar Ó Beirn a fuair mé ó Pat Gillespie, An Baile Mór agus Mick Browne, Teach Tom, An Charraig. Ar dheis tá pioctúir de Séamus Ennis a fuair mé ar an Idirlíon.

b. `Bhain mé an scéal “Báthadh Phrochlaisc” de thaifeadú ó Ian Lee i g-Carlann RTE agus ó Mick Browne.



CUAN PHROCHLAISC---BRUCKLESS BAY

TRANSLATION

BRUCKLESS DROWNINGS -THE STORY AND TUNE

AS TOLD AND LILTED BY PEADAR O BEIRN FOR SÉAMUS ENNIS IN 1949

In the year 1813 when the Teelin fishermen were fishing in wee boats; before they got big boats or anything else from the English Government or from any other source. There was only the sail and the four oars and the poor crathurs had to be everywhere while a man had the power and fitness to pull an oar. And there was no place around near home, where there was anything going, but they would have to be there to earn a pound.

But one year as I have said already, they had to go over to Bruckless and there is a dirty bay there. But one night as the story goes as they were getting ready to go to sea, a wee oul' woman came--she must have been a witch; she came 'round the place and the fishermen started blackguardin' and makin' devilment on her and one fella grabbed a spiny dogfish or something and threw it at her. But he didn't know who he was harragin'! Anyway, one man from the fleet asked them to let her be--for they did not know who she was. When she seen that he had more sense than the rest, she went o'er as far as him. "Well, you there, don't you go to sea the night" says she "and ye'll not be any the worse off in mornin". But there were four or five members of his family fishing with him in their own boat and they were making fun and teasing their father for giving in to an oul' woman of that kind because of her ranting but it made no difference. When he put any doubt in it, he said he would not go to sea and some of his family went out in other boats against his bidding.

But when they had their nets shot, the night changed and before long there was a severe "Way of Sorrow and Lamentations" in that same place. The night changed and it got so bad that the first crews that had hauled their nets were been drowned as they reached the land and it seems it was so. when all was over and finished, a great slaughter had happened and after the Drownings, the widows left were numbered in many hundreds.

Anyway, it seems that there was someone whose attention was taken away from the disaster---he heard somebody---a musical instrument---most likely a piper it was believed---there was a musical instrument on the shore and it was believed to be a piper because it is a piper that follows that kind of slaughter and witchcraft and all sort of capers of that kind. But anyway, there was somebody who had the tune with him---e dal e dal el.....

That's the tune of the Bruckless Drownings.

N.B. *Harragin'*: Related to *Harry* and *Harass* from Old English *Herian*, *Hergian* from Germanic *Here* = Army and Norse *Herm* = Army. Oxford English Dictionary. (The old Coast Guard Look-out Post in Rhannakilla is called the "*Harragin 'House'*"). See also my notes on the Gaelic word "*Tuargain*" on Page 36. S Ua G.

The Parish
of
Killaghtee

BY

PATRICK J. MACGILL

(1968)

THE BRUCKLESS DROWNING
1813 or 1814

As we stand by the castle and gaze over the placid waters of Bruckless Bay to St. John's Point we cannot help reflecting on that terrible morning in February 1813 (or 1814) when the

shore was bestrewn with the dead bodies of fishermen,

“and the sea all around was covered with the floating debris of their gallant crafts. Oars, spars, nets, sails, kegs, dead herrings, and the sea all around was covered with boats floated promiscuously on the surging tide.”

These words are taken from "Cliff Scenery of South-Western Donegal (1867)", by Thomas Cohn Mac Ginley, then a teacher in Croagh, and he gives the date of the tragedy as 1813, which agrees with tradition. But Rev. James B. Leslie, M.A, perhaps quoting church records, states, under Killaghtee, in "Raphoe Clergy and Parishes" (1940), that the disaster took place on 12th February, 1814, that twenty fishing boats were smashed and 43 lives lost in the storm.

While many of the victims belonged to Bruckless, then a thriving fishing port, many also were from Killybegs, Kilcar, Teelin and Malinbeg. Every hour brought wives, parents, sons and daughters who, through heart-rending sobs and tears tried to identify the remains of a loved one. Those who witnessed that tragic day were haunted to the end of their lives by its harrowing memory.

A few, but only a few, escaped to tell the tale of that terrible storm that whirled through the bay with the force of a tornado. The Sheanachie ascribes the disaster to the incantations of a local witch who had been refused a "gallach" of herrings at the port the day before. She placed a "copán" in a tub of water which she swirled violently as she chanted her evil magic formulae. Eventually the "copán" sank to the bottom. Then she clapped her hands with fiendish glee, screaming "They're all finished now." Next day her cabin was empty and she was never seen again.

=====

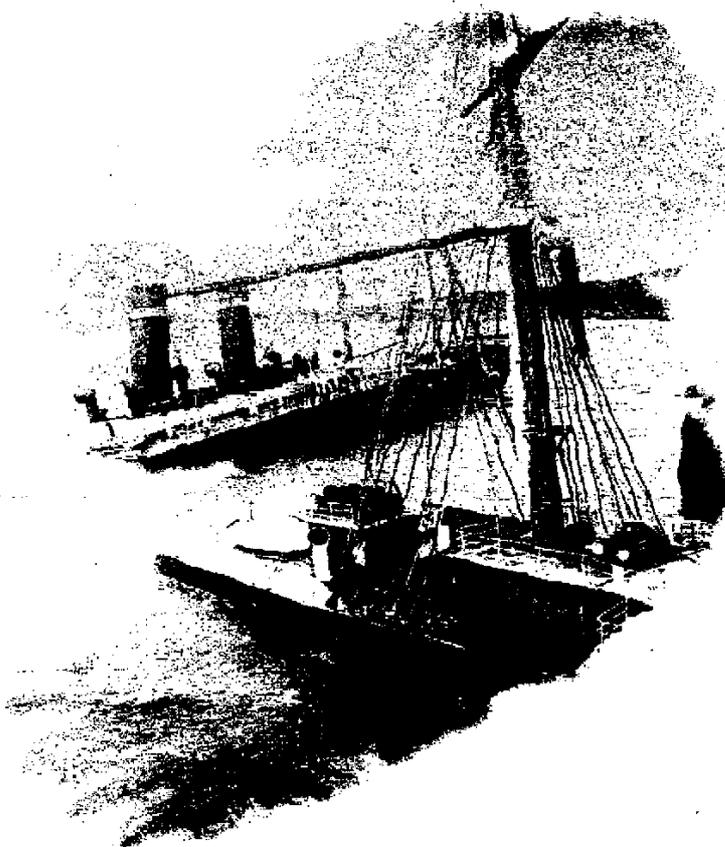
BRUCKLESS

Year—Name of Vessel—Type of Vessel—Cargo—Comments—Ref.

1813—Fishing Boats—Open Sail Boats—Ballast—Probably Salvaged—f

The above entry is copied from <http://www.irishshipwrecksonline.net/Lists/DonegalWestSouthList.htm>

from:
SHIPWRECKS
 of the
IRISH COAST
 1105-1993



by **EDWARD J. BOURKE**

(Published by the author 1994)

FISHING DISASTERS

On 16-12-1815 the Donegal fishing fleet was caught in Bruckless Bay by a sudden storm. Many boats were overturned and over eighty persons were drowned. A vast shoal of herring had accumulated in the bay. The price of herring was very high due to a salt shortage and the rewards were substantial for all involved. From Teelin came 120 boats. Two hundred boats assembled at Fintra. The shoal moved out to sea and was followed by the boats. A sudden storm caught the fragile craft overloaded with fish with disastrous results.

The above extract is taken from Page 213 of the above book. S Ua G.



LEABHARLANN
Dhún na nGall
 DONEGAL COUNTY LIBRARY

October 16th 2004

Bhór d'ag

Ar d'ag

Dáta

Mr Seosamh Ua Gallchobhair
 "An Sean Cheidh"
 Rhannakilla
 Teelin
 Carrick, Co Donegal

Dear Mr Ua Gallchobhair

Thank you for your inquiry on the "Great Bruckless Drownings", and especially for providing us with a copy of your work, which is very informative, and will be a very valuable addition to our Local Studies Collection. I am enclosing photocopied items from books we have here, which refer to the tragedy. As you see, we have very little documentation of the event. Our microfilmed copies of the "Londonderry Journal" start in 1835, but the Centre for Migration Studies in the Folk Park in Omagh have earlier copies. English naval reports may be in the Public Records Office in Kew, Surrey. (They likely have a website)

Also I checked the 1963 editions of the "Donegal Democrat" and the 1863, 1913, and 1963 editions of the "Derry Journal", in the hope that on the 50th, 100th and 150th anniversary of the drownings, there might have been a reference to a commemoration, but, unfortunately, this was not the case. If I can check any other sources we may have, please ring me here in the Central Library.

Regards,

Berni Campbell



Berni Campbell, Local Studies

Central Library & Arts Centre
 Lárleabharlann 7 Ionad Ealaíne

Lárleabharlann & Ionad Ealaíne,
 Bóthar Ollbheáir Pluincéad,
 Leitir Ceanainn, Co. Dhún na nGall.

Central Library & Arts Centre,
 Oliver Plunkett Road,
 Letterkenny, Co. Donegal.
 Tel/Fax 353+74+24950

Bathadh Bhruchlais

le Eighneachán Ó Muireadhaigh

Tá sé níos mó na céad bliain anois ó bhí bathadh Bhruchlais ann. Cailleadh gach uile bád ó na Scalbhuidhe thart go Teileann a bhí amuigh an oíche sin acht bád amháin as Cill Chartha agus seo an rud a thug an bád sin slán.

Nuair a chonaiceas daofa nach raibh fuasgladh ón anaithe acu agus go raibh siad i mbaol a gcaillte, d'éirigh an fear ar leis an bád ins an toiseach agus le guth ard scairt sé ar Naomh Chartha mar leanas:- "Ó a Chartha Dhílis a bhfuil do chúid toibreacha agus cárán agus créafóg bheannaithe in m'fhearann dúchais, sábháil sinn anocht ó gach contúirt agus anfa." Ní luaithe an paidir ráite aige ná tháinig solas ag toiseach agus ag deireadh an bháid agus ón méid a bhí amuigh an oíche sin ní tháinig slán acht an fhoireann sin.

Ag caint fán bathadh mór sin deirtear gur bean siúil a ba chiontaí leis agus seo an scéal: An tráthnóna céanna ní raibh cosúlacht ná smaointiú ar dhoineann. Bhí na scadáin le fáil go flúirseach amuigh ó bhéal chuan Bhruchlais, ní raibh aon bhád thart fá na cóstaí nach raibh ar thalamh na hiascaireachta.

Shiúil an bhean isteach i dtreach inteacht ar a Bhruchlais ag iarraidh deiree. Cibé ar bith fáth is costúil gur diúltaíodh dádaidh a thabhairt díthe, lig sí amach an mála buí ar a raibh istigh. Thosaigh na mallachtaí agus na heascainí acht níor stad sí le sin. Fuair sí tobán uisce agus cupán. Chuir sí an cupán ar an uisce agus thosaigh an rámas pisreogach. Chomh fhad is bhí sí ag an rámas thosaigh uisce an tobáin ag éirí agus ag fiuchadh agus an cupán a' luascadh anonn is anall agus san am chéanna amuigh sa chuan d'éirigh an doineann go tobann agus na tonnta ar mire ag bualadh in aghaidh na gearraigeacha; bhí na bádaí ghá dtuargain ag na tonnta móra a bhí réidh gach bomaite lena slogadh ina geraois ocracha.

Bhí sí ag coimeád i rith an ama ar oibriú an uisce sa tobán agus nuair a chuaigh an cupán go tóin rinne sí gáire dóite droch-chroíoch agus ar síe "beidh croíthe cráite ar an dúiche seo anocht". D'imigh sí as an cheantar agus ní thacthas í ní ba mhó.

Anaithe= Anfa(ch)= Anfadh. Ó Dónaill agus Dinneen.

Tuargain= Hammering, battering, bombarding. Dinneen.

Thóg an t-alt seo thuas as an leabhair "Comórtas Peile na Gaeltachta 2004: Cill Chartha".

ADDENDUM

Today, 29/03/2006 I visited the old Graveyard beside St. Catherine's Well in Killybegs and I found a gravestone with the following inscription:

HERE LIETH THE BODY OF JAMES HAMILTON WHO DEPARTED

THIS LIFE ON THE 12TH OF FEB 1813

AGED 32 YEARS.

Could James Hamilton have been a victim of the Bruckless Drownings?

Seosamh Ua Gallchobhair