

# Mapping Through Memory: The location and nature of Mass paths in Ireland.

Dr Hilary Bishop<sup>1\*</sup>, Mr Michael Hurley<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Liverpool John Moores University, Redmonds Building, Brownlow Hill, Liverpool, L3 5UG

<sup>2</sup>Lackagh Museum and Community Development Association, Turloughmore, co. Galway, Republic of Ireland

First received: 31st March 2022

Accepted for publication: 21 January 2023

**Abstract:** Methodologies that capture the ways in which individuals and communities value places are becoming increasingly attractive to policymakers and authors highlight the need for additional tools and archival material concerning how people engage with landscapes on an everyday basis. This paper addresses that need and argues that oral history and personal memory can be used as effective tools for geographical mapping and analysis, both physical and virtual. Religion involves the collective identity of a people and has strong affinities with the traditions and knowledge handed down from generation to generation. Such traditions and knowledge are often handed down orally and offer potential for geographical enquiry. Oral history can provide unique insights into the history of place, often providing narratives about the recollection of self, relationships with others and place, insights rarely provided in such depth by other methods. Place memory has become an important theme in recent geographical research and landscape can be mapped through memories and stories to create a virtual cartography of place. Using a case study approach in Lackagh, County Galway, the authors use an innovative assemblage of methods to produce one of the most thorough syntheses of information available in respect to the location, history and heritage of Mass paths in Ireland at a parish level.

**Key words:** Ireland, Catholic, Mass Path, Memory, Mapping

*“Some of these journeys remain forever in one’s memory. Such as seeing the flashlights moving slowly through the fields on the dark evenings of a Mission or going to 7.30 a.m. Mass on a Christmas morning as the frosty grass shone in the light of the moon at the break of day” (Murphy, 1990).*

## 1. Background

The Penal Laws were passed against Catholics and dissenters between 1695 and 1756 and their impact upon the Catholic Church and religious practice has come to define this period (Elliott, 2009, p. 165). Whilst the Penal Laws managed to limit the public expression of Catholicism in Ireland, they did not ensure the elimination of Catholicism or result in the mass conversion of Catholics (Bartlett, 1990, p. 2). Despite chapels being appropriated by Protestant authorities, Mass continued to be celebrated in secret at various locations including barns, out-buildings and private homes. It was frequently celebrated in ditches or under trees and bushes as well as at open-air altars known as *Carraig an Aifrinn* or Mass Rocks. The Mass Rocks were located in fields and glens or on mountainsides and the majority are primarily known today at a local level with information being passed down orally from generation to generation (Bishop, 2018, p. 19).

Known in Irish as *Slí an Aifrin* (Mass way) or *Cosán an Aifrin* (Mass footpath), routes taken to celebrate Mass were called Mass paths. Initially these paths would have remained secret to avoid detection by authorities keen to arrest officiating priests. Often the location of Mass would have been passed by word of mouth and Mass goers would have walked along the beds of streams to hide their footprints (McGarvey, 1956, p. 184). When land eventually became available to build new churches, the tradition of using Mass paths continued. Most people could not afford horse-drawn carts and coaches and so they continued to travel on foot to Mass. This mode of travel traced movement onto the surface of the land and defined the physical limits of the Mass paths and the landscape in the lives of the people who walked them. The paths typically crossed fields and bog land and were often situated close to boundary walls, fences and hedgerows to afford some shelter along the way. Eventually the Mass paths converged near the local parish church.

### 1.1 The Irish landscape

During his many years of research in the west of Ireland, Tim Robinson developed a deep understanding of the complexity of the Irish landscape and the ways it had been layered by the passing of time (Wall, 2008, p67). Robinson described the weaving of land and life as ‘both an inimitable and intrinsic quality of the landscape’ (Wylie, 2012, p.373). For Robinson, landscape was not merely terrain but also the embodiment of human perspectives on that terrain. He believed that we, as humans, whether individually, cumulatively or communally, create and recreate landscapes (Robinson, 1993, p.30).

### 1.2 Place Making

If we can define landscape, then what is place? Massey describes place as ‘intersecting social relations, nets of which have over time been constructed, laid down, interacted with one another, decayed and renewed’. She argues that some of these relations will

be contained within the place whilst others will be stretched beyond it (Massey, 1994, p.121). Robinson suggests that there is a clear difference between a mere location and a real place (Robinson, 1993, p.30). Whilst location is a physical setting, place can be considered as a contextual location that incorporates experience and emotion (Babine, 2011, p.97) so that a mere location becomes 'intensified into *place*' (Robinson, 1990, p.23). Robinson concludes that a true place has 'dimensions of subjectivity, of memory and the forgotten' (Robinson, 1993, p.31).

### 1.3 Place Affect

To experience place is to be 'affected by place' (Duff, 2010, p.881). Affect describes both the distinctive set of feeling states realisable within a particular place as well as the store of action-potential, of expressions, capacities and practices experienced in that space (Duff, 2010, p.885). Affect is the means by which fragments of subjectivity, memory, and purpose are deposited in place (Duff, 2010, p.892). Individuals and groups are deeply affected by place, and are equally affected by the varied activities, practices, and people they encounter in that place (Duff, 2010, p.891).

Affective atmospheres capture the emotional feel of a place (Duff, 2010, p.881-2) and a body's 'capacity to affect and become affected' may be changed through the deliberate practice of remembering in which a forgotten past is relived, even if only for a moment, before fading into an atmosphere (Anderson, 2014, p.167). Places stretch through time (Massey, 1995, p.188) but the memories and traditions associated with place do not only exist in the past, they are also actively built in the present (Massey, 1995, p.184).

### 1.4 Place Memory

Place memory has become an important theme in recent geographical research (Riley and Harvey, 2007, p.349) and a review of literature on place memory (Hoelscher and Alderman, 2004; Massey, 2005; Till, 2005; Anderman, 2012; Murphy, 2016) shows consensus in the fact that the identity of specific places, and their relationship to and with memory, is wholly mediated by the interaction of people with those places. People create deep and very meaningful attachments to the places they inhabit, and these attachments are strengthened by the activities they undertake in those places, the communities in which they live, and the various events that they experienced in those places throughout their lives (Murphy, 2016, p.586). Places are 'never merely backdrops for action or containers of the past. They are fluid mosaics and moments of memory, matter, metaphor, scene and experience that create and mediate social spaces and temporalities' (Till, 2005, p.8).

Murphy has defined the mapping of these memories as 'the aesthetic process of mapping the affective, polyvocal, temporally layered relationship between past and present as experienced by individuals and the communities in which they live' (Murphy, 2016, p.571). Memory maps are able to locate memory in sites, objects, images, ghosts, place-based practices, and stories, therefore creating intricate, heterogeneous

frameworks for authoring, knowing and making meaning. These visual maps of memory add new depth to our understanding of the relationship that exists between place and memory, and provide opportunities for political change through an increased awareness within the public sphere (Murphy, 2016, p.572).

### **1.5 Landscape Change and Memory**

Tim Robinson's work has become quintessential for anyone interested in, and concerned with, the changing nature of the modern Irish landscape (Cronin, 2016, p.53). During fieldwork Robinson noted the extensive merging of fields and reported the many field walls that had been removed along with a number of archaeological monuments (Duffy, 2016, p.29). Wylie, like Robinson, acknowledges the imminent danger posed to landscapes, many having already disappeared (Wylie, 2012, p.366). Changing farming practices and a falling population have broken the link between people and land in the west of Ireland and resulted in an accompanying loss of memory and meaning (Duffy, 2016, p.28). This loss of memory was something that Robinson noted during his research in Connemara (Robinson, 2003, p.17).

Ireland's rural landscape enshrines so much of the island's history and yet, according to Aalen, it seems 'so poorly understood, generally undervalued, and persistently abused by private and public activities' (Aalen, 1993, p.106). Land ownership and control has always been a critical factor in Irish rural history and remains a strong influence over attitudes towards land in Ireland today. Indeed, so strong are the considerations of land ownership over land use, much land remains neglected despite its perceived importance (Aalen, 1993, p.150). Farmed land has a significance beyond its capacity for agricultural production (Dwyer and Hodge, 1996, p.4) and many of the areas severely threatened by agricultural decline are the main repositories for natural and cultural heritage in Ireland (Dunford, 2008, p.19).

### **1.6 Summary of Literature**

As a communion between land and life, nature and culture, landscape may be thought of as a reservoir for our experience, identity and authenticity (Wylie, 2012, p.366). Where a focusing of the landscape occurs, location is intensified into *place* (Robinson, 1990, p.23) which includes dimensions of subjectivity, memory and the forgotten (Robinson, 1993, p.31). Individuals and groups are deeply affected by place and the varied activities, practices, and people they encounter in that place (Duff, 2010, p.891). Their memories of place can be mapped to add new depth to our understanding of the relationship that exists between people and place (Murphy, 2016, p.572) and this is becoming increasingly important given the changing nature of the modern Irish landscape and the resultant loss of heritage. This paper argues that oral history and personal memory can be used as effective tools for geographical mapping and analysis, particularly where topographical features such as Mass paths no longer exist or where few observable features remain.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Case Study Identification

Early cartographers had no cause to publicise Catholic places of worship, by putting them on maps, for fear that this might have been misunderstood as a gesture of legitimisation. As a result, many Government Officials paid little attention to them (Andrews, 1997, p.19). Even with updated sources available from Ordnance Survey Ireland, the vast majority of Mass paths remain absent from cartographic sources. The Record of Monuments and Places, which forms the foundation of the list of all historical sites in the Republic of Ireland, predominantly consists of built structures which pre-date 1700AD (Cooney et al, 2000, p.26) although there is some discretion where post-1700AD sites of national importance are concerned (Rynne, 2000, p.53); although it does record some historical pathways, it does not include Mass paths. Paths are part of the webbing of the landscape (MacFarlane, 2013, p.13) and represent ‘acts of consensual making’ that reveal the ‘habits of the landscape’ (p.17). Mass paths have been, and continue to be, an intimate part of the Irish landscape.

The study of Mass paths is a neglected area of study and historiographical surveys of pathways are exceptionally rare. There is no available database that identifies and records Mass paths meaning that they have no official recognition, definition, status or protection despite many having become established rights of way. Many are under physical threat from agricultural practices, land neglect, planning and infrastructural development such as those at Parkmore and Coolagh (Hynes Go-along, 2019), both located in county Galway.

During a Moore Institute Visiting Research Fellowship at NUI Galway in April, 2018 the principal researcher identified 21 Mass paths across the county of Galway using documents and publications within the archives and special collections of the University of Galway Library including the Tim Robinson Archive. A strong concentration of eight Mass paths was identified within the townland of Lackagh, county Galway, making this parish an excellent candidate for a case study approach.

### 2.2 Participatory Mapping

Similar to the approach used by Langemeyer et al (2018) in Catalonia (Spain), and Krinke (2023) in Minnesota (USA), the methodology here included participatory mapping. To facilitate the mapping of people’s memories, the principal researcher used archived Ordnance Survey maps as templates to identify the potential Mass path routes which were then plotted on two poster-sized maps: one Ordnance Survey and the other Google Earth. A community workshop was held at Lackagh parish centre, drawing together members of Lackagh Heritage Committee, local landowners, farmers and residents in an effort to verify the paths identified on the maps, record memories and narratives associated with the paths, and to collect any further data. Attendees were invited to physically map or mark Mass path routes as well as places of meaning and significance on the maps.

A workshop format was chosen as part of the research methodology because it offered a collaborative and interactive environment whereby all participants could learn and acquire new knowledge concerning the project and the Mass paths in the parish whilst also producing data for research purposes. The workshop was run using an 'in conversation' approach with the maps as a visual prompt to start discussions and to open up a dialogue about the Mass paths. This was done to connect individual experiences with a wider historical picture that conveyed an intricate and multidisciplinary history and heritage of their location, nature and use over time.

### **2.3 Interviews**

Downs and Stea (1977) show that when we navigate a space from the past, or rather, when we remember a space in the present, individuals create a 'cognitive map'. This cognitive map allows us to generate mental images and models of the environment which are present again (Downs and Stea, 1977, p.7). Cognitive mapping is the memory of the practice of space. It allows us to step inside the picture frame and inhabit the space from within and, unlike paper maps, 'it is neither static nor a singularly spatial representation'. It offers another way to understand a landscape that acknowledges the perpetual reworking of both place and memory over time (Jardine Brown, 2012, p.427). Cognitive maps are active representations of space that are continually renegotiated through narrative encounters and not simply 'surveys of routes'. Instead, they represent the routes themselves, ensuring that 'a way of being in the world' is remembered (Jardine Brown, 2012, p.442).

Interviews were held with five local residents from older generations and two residents who lived outside the parish to record the narratives associated with the Mass paths, first-hand experience of the heritage and traditions associated with Mass paths, and wider perspectives and insights into Irish rural life within religious and historical contexts. As Corning and Schuman observe, belonging to a specific generation endows each of us with a place in the historical process, and this in turn exposes us (and limits us) to a particular range of experience, thought and action (Corning and Schuman, 2015, p.77). Older generations were chosen for interview and go-alongs because they were the generation that would have walked the Mass paths.

Religion involves the collective identity of a people and has strong affinities with the traditions and knowledge handed down from generation to generation (Cusack, 2011, p.2). Such traditions and knowledge are often handed down orally and Andrews *et al* (2006) advocate the potential of these oral histories, especially for geographical enquiry. They suggest that 'they clearly demonstrate unique insights into the history of places' providing narratives about the recollection of self, relationships with others and place. These are insights rarely provided in such depth by other methods (cited in Riley and Harvey, 2007, p.348). Local memory aligns closely with oral history and can be termed as 'straightforward recollection'. Consisting of stories based solely upon local knowledge or interest, often featuring named individuals, these stories and descriptions can be atomized and fragmentary yet there is often some form of mnemonic involved

attaching the story to a specific place or point in the landscape (Ó Ciosáin, 2004, p.224-25). As Fivush advocates, the memory of our past is not relegated to a dusty archive, but lives in the moment, in a constantly evolving dialectic between our self and others in the telling and retelling of who we are through what we remember (Fivush, 2008, p.56). In my analysis of these interviews, I consider how encounters with the Mass paths contribute to our understanding of the past in the context of the present.

#### **2.4 Field Research**

Field research undertaken by the researchers between June and August 2019 allowed us to map locations and routes, helping to evaluate the geographical spread, topography and use of Mass paths over time. It also resulted in three go-alongs, two short encounters and one informal conversation. The mapping highlighted potential locations where there were few observable features but good oral testimony and historical records, which could then be integrated into future landscape and fieldwork studies. Field work also highlighted the need for rescue and maintenance strategies at some sites where there was evidence of damage offering the opportunity for potential policy change within the heritage sector and schedules of work by Galway County Council. Paths were mapped to record co-ordinates using Garmin eTrex 20x outdoor handheld GPS unit and used to create a freely downloadable digital map (see [www.findamassrock.com](http://www.findamassrock.com)).

Field research is notoriously difficult in Ireland due to limited rights of way across private land. Even the informal rights to access the countryside are slowly being withdrawn limiting access to archaeologists and historians to some of Ireland's most historical sites and monuments (Keep Ireland Open, 2022). This limited the research area and it was not possible to walk the fields and paths in totality.

#### **2.5 Photography**

During field research, the researcher worked in partnership with a professional artist to produce a series of 15 photographs in respect to the Mass paths identified. This method was included because creative outputs can convey aspects of a story where traditional written or spoken sources fail and can engage audiences in ways that may not be possible through more conventional methods. The artist's photography, painting and etching produced a multi-layered artwork that replicated the palimpsest nature of the landscape mirroring the academic objectives of this research project. The photographs were to be used at a free public exhibition and to go on permanent display at Lackagh Heritage Centre, Galway and are currently viewable on the artist's website [www.caitrionadunnett.com](http://www.caitrionadunnett.com).

#### **2.6 Go-alongs**

As Carpiano explains through her research in Wisconsin (USA), the go-along method is a form of in-depth qualitative interview method that is conducted by researchers

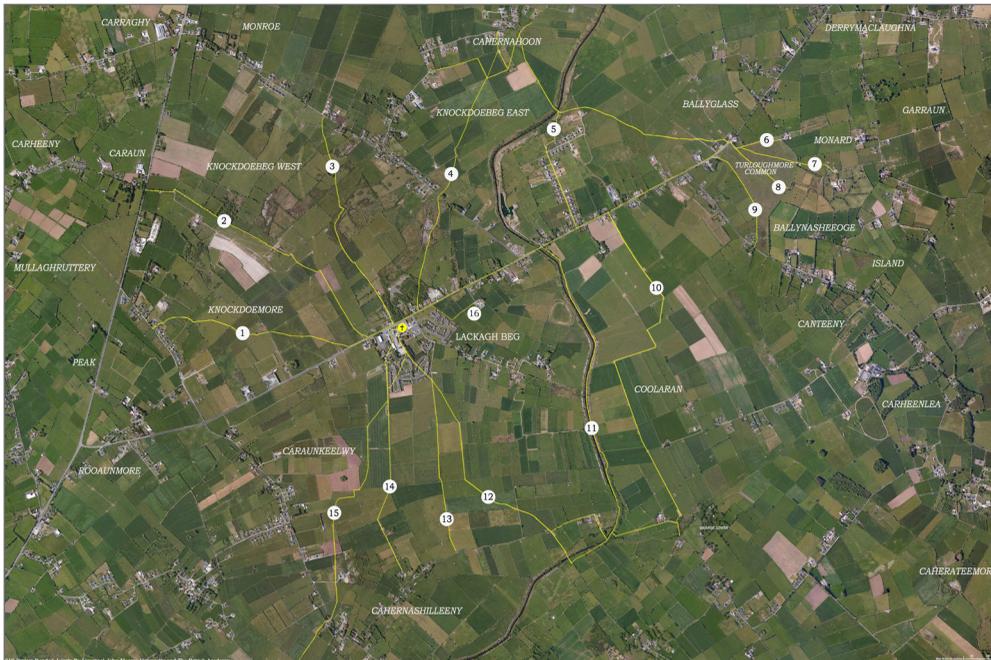
accompanying individuals on outings in familiar environments, such as a neighbourhood or larger local areas (Carpiano, 2009, p.264). The go-along is very flexible and can be tailored to the needs of a specific research project. It draws from, and yet compliments, two other qualitative methods (field observation and qualitative interviewing) used for studying place, both of which are used within this research project. By fusing these traditional methodological techniques, the go-along simultaneously takes advantage of the strengths of each method, while employing both to compensate for the limitation of each (Carpiano, 2009, p.265). In her research in Los Angeles (USA), Kusenbach (2003) explores the strengths and weaknesses of go-alongs, highlighting their potential to uncover aspects of individual lived experience that frequently remain hidden when using more traditional methods such as participant observations and sit-down interviews.

Most go-alongs use audio-recording only (Carpiano, 2009; Kusenbach, 2003), but there is an increasing interest in combining routes and discourse in a map that is able to conserve the space-stimulated recollections (Jones and Evans, 2012). A total of three go-alongs were undertaken by the researcher. Similar in approach to Bergeron *et al.*, 2014 in Quebec (Canada), and Jones *et al* (2008 and 2011) in Birmingham (UK), we used GIS technology to geotag keywords and photographs while recording commentary using a digital voice recorder. This was supplemented with the use of digital photography at key points.

As Vanderheyden *et al* noted during their research in Belgium, most landscape researchers focus on natural or exceptional landscapes and their potential in terms of touristic value or their need for protection. In contrast, ordinary landscapes or those parts of the countryside that are not recognized for their iconic value, scarcity or potential to attract tourism, attract far less interest (Vanderheyden *et al*, 2013, p.591). Landscapes play an important role as historical repositories and act as a national aesthetic arena for embodied and sensory experience and practice (Maddrell, 2013, p.64) yet, while remarkable landscapes may be protected because of their hereditary character, this is not usually the case for ordinary landscapes (Schmitz, 2005). This is clearly relevant in the case of Mass paths. This Lackagh case study reveals the rich and diverse memories that can be associated with such seemingly ordinary landscapes.

### 3. Data and Analysis

The data was collected and analysed and a total of 16 Mass paths were identified for the parish of Lackagh (Figure 1); in this process a new path, and a continuation of an existing path, was identified. The assemblage of methods used combine to produce a new body of robust data that reflects a values-attributed approach to living heritage (social habits, traditions, rituals, meanings and experiences) alongside more traditional numerical approaches. The data will provide an important resource for policymakers seeking to develop evidence-based policy.



**Figure 1** Map of Mass Paths in the Parish of Lackagh

### 3.1 Lackagh Parish

In his *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, Lewis described Lackagh as ‘a parish in the barony of Clare, county Galway, and province of Connaught’. He noted that it was a vicarage in the diocese of Tuam, forming part of a union of Annaghdown (Lewis, 1837). By the mid-1850s *Griffith’s Valuation of Ireland* defined Lackagh parish church as being on the boundary of Lackaghbeg (small or lesser place of stones) and Knockdoe (The Hill of the Axes) and known locally as Carnoneen chapel. Similarly, Lackagh Parish was known locally as the Parish of Carnoneen, which translates as the Parish of the daisy cairn (Griffith, 1864).

The *Report on the State of Popery in Ireland*, conducted in 1731, identifies a number of Friaries in county Galway; there were three friars resident in a Friary in Claregalway and about 20 in a Friary in Athenry. The report was commissioned by the House of Lords to establish the state of ‘popery’ in Ireland and more generally across the whole kingdom. The Friars of Athenry were reported to have removed themselves from the Friary and were living in a house in a wood two miles from the town, indicating some level of religious persecution in the diocese during the Penal era (Catholic Historical Society of Ireland, 1914). During Penal times Mass was often celebrated in the ruins of churches and religious houses that had been destroyed during the upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a practice that continued in Claregalway Abbey well into the nineteenth century (Hughes, 1997, p.25).

In Lackagh, locals remember stories about a Mass Rock in Qualter's field where Mass was celebrated during Penal times and Hurley reports that Mass was also in said in a barn in Liscananaun (Fort of Cananaun) (Hurley, 2019, p.28). During interviews undertaken in 2001 as part of a Turloughmore heritage project, Mary Glavin of Mirah spoke of the *dún* (fort) on Concannon's land where priests used to hide in Penal times (Blackmore et al, 2001, p.12). This further demonstrates that there was some level of persecution in the parish during this period and it is documented that there was a much stronger Catholic presence in Galway than in other parts of the country during Penal times, especially within the Tuam Archdiocese of which Lackagh was an integral part (Solan, 1993, p.44). Despite this, there is no specific information in the *Report on the State of Popery* concerning the parish.

The present church at Lackagh was built under the direction of Father Thomas Kearney in 1838 and, during its construction, Mass was celebrated in the ruin of the old castle which stood on the site now occupied by Flynn's sheds. Prior to that a small, thatched chapel was built beside the ruin of Carnoneen Castle to the south-west of the present church but was reputedly destroyed by fire when flax drying on the floor of the church was accidentally ignited (Hurley, 2019, p.37). The location of the Mass paths in the parish of Lackagh places them within the nineteenth century and they are more likely to date from the building of the thatched chapel and subsequent church rather than to Penal times.

### **3.2 Mass Paths**

Mass paths were not just used for going to Mass, they were also used by children as a route to school (Fallon Go-along, 2019) and some, such as such as Ballybrit in county Galway used by race goers on race days, remain in use today (Ó Laoi, 1998). In general, however, the use of Mass paths in Ireland has waned in recent decades and many have fallen out of use. As locations of a distinctively Catholic faith, Mass paths remain important historic pathways within the rural landscape and present a tangible link to Ireland's rich history and heritage. Figure 1 shows these paths (numbered 1–16), each of which is described in Hurley (2019).

**Mass path (1)** from Pat Lardner's house on Tinker's Lane across Knockdoemore through Kearney's and Collins' land and out onto the main road at Collins' water tank.

**Mass path (2)** from Liscananaun by Bawnmore (the big field) National School to Joyce's house on Tuam Road, into the road by the side of Caulfield's house, across Knockdoemore West into Knockdoemore and onto Lackagh Road through Sean Walsh's field. The stile onto the Lackagh Road was situated beside Mannion's cottage and whilst there is still a stile present, the cottage is no longer there. The stile onto Lackagh Road was little used because Annie Mannion used to leave the back door and front door of the cottage open and Mass goers would simply walk through her kitchen to the church opposite (Walsh Go-along, 2019). A Mass path stile was re-discovered along this route close to the Thunder Field, so named because thunder struck while the Walsh family were harvesting (Walsh Go-along, 2019). One of the benefits of the go-along, as identified by



**Figure 2** Re-discovered Stile, Mass Path 2, (image authors' own)

Kusenback (2003, p.472), is the biographical nature of the activity as the go-along brings to the foreground a stream of associations that occupy the informant while moving through the physical space as evidenced here. Go-alongs are able to capture spacially explicit representations of the intangible values that are linked to cultural heritage and place identity (Langemeyer et al, 2018).

To experience place is to be *affected by place* (Duff, 2010, p.881) and a body's capacity to affect or become affected may be altered by the intentional act of remembering in which a forgotten past becomes relived (Anderson, 2014, p.167). Cissie Commons remembers walking the Mass path with her sister and two other girls that lived nearby, all having fasted from midnight the night before. It took around two hours to walk the Mass path and she would wear a raincoat and walk in her old shoes, carrying clothes to change into across her arm. They would cross over stiles (Figure 2) and gaps where the walls had been knocked and she clearly remembered the stile where they crossed the road from Billy Joyce's out towards Caulfield's. She was careful to record that they did not go into Caulfield's field as indicated on the workshop maps, but instead crossed into Billy Joyce's field and from there walked up by the wall until they arrived at Mannion's house. Mannion had an open shed beside the house, and they went in there to take off their old coats and shoes and put on their 'so called good ones' before going into Mass. After Mass they would change back and return the same way they had come (Commons Interview, 2019).

In her discussion of ‘territory’, Whiston Spirn identifies that movement within a space is key to defining its boundaries and that sometimes this movement is corralled through ‘gateways’ that function as ‘places of passage and exchange’ (Whiston Spirn, 1998, p.119). As Jardine Brown notes in her research in West Berkshire, UK, frontiers of social, cultural and political exchange are as ‘transportable’ as the boundaries themselves, in that they are located within the landscape through the narratives of practiced space (Jardine Brown, 2012, p.434). Like the stile where Cissie crossed the road from Billy Joyce’s and went out towards Caulfield’s, or the shed beside Mannion’s house, they may be a concrete entity in the landscape, but they could also be a more arbitrary frontier such as the Mass path itself or the fields traversed.

**Mass path (3)** from *Bothar na Reilge* (Graveyard or Church Road), which is also known as Knockdoe Road, through Knockdoebeg West down by *Poll na Taibhse*, or the Hole of the Ghosts, and down Knockdoe Hill to Carnoneen coming out at the extant stile on Lackagh Road between Walsh’s and Moran’s. People coming from Munroe would also have crossed at the back of Knockdoe Hill, come up through Knockdoemore and on to the church (Lackagh Turloughmore Parish History Committee, 1990, p.55).

**Mass path (4)** from the corner at Joe Badger’s house at Cahernahoon Road towards *Turloughalín* (little turlough), and there is another branch from Corbally to *Turloughalín* (Figure 3). The path goes through Knockdoebeg East, across the rock and out onto the road at ‘Eddie Donnellan’s stile’, where Joe Collins’ house now stands (Hurley, 2019, p.32).



**Figure 3** Roadside Stile, Mass path 4 (image authors’ own)

During an informal interview, Joe Badger remarked that farmers in Lackagh never ploughed near a Mass path. The Mass path on his land was about six or seven inches higher than the land around it and about 3ft wide. In the nineteenth century it was ploughed with horses and the farmer had to lift the plough when he came to the Mass path (Badger Informal Interview, 2019). Johnny Grealish remembers that his father hardly ever let the horses turn on the headland that was up at Grange, nor up to the Grange stile which still remains in situ. In recounting the lives of his parents Johnny was able to map the landscape back to the 1950s. When Johnny himself installed a pen up near Grange, he was careful to leave the Mass path untouched, making sure that the wall was made at the side of the path and not on it (Grealish Interview, 2019). Duff advocates that people are deeply affected by the varied practices, activities and bodies that they encounter in place (Duff, 2010, p.891) and this is evident in Johnny's recollections.

Murphy found that memories are 'the stories of past events and experiences that shape who we are, giving meaning to our identities and very existence' (Murphy, 2016, p.573). How these memories affect us and move us emotionally is what gives colour, texture, and life to memories, and what keeps memories alive, circulating in the present. In her research about El Salvador, she concludes that affect is 'the feeling and *doing*, the acting and being acted upon, the way of being in one's life that is brought on by the ongoing act of remembering and, in a sense, living with memory' (Murphy, 2016, p.574). The affective relationship between Johnny Grealish and the land at Grange, the Mass path and the stile is clear and demonstrates that the lived relationship that exists between memory and affect is essential and inseparable.

**Mass path (5)** from Cahernahoon to the 'new bridge' path (figure 4) with a fork to the right into Lackaghmore, meeting the main road at Jarlath McDonagh's house. On the OS map, this path also takes a fork towards the east across the fields terminating at Jackie Murray's Public House although it is doubtful that this section was part of the Mass path.



**Figure 4** Stile over bridge, Mass Path 5  
(image authors' own)

**Mass path (6)** from Johnny Shaughnessy's house to Copper Beech pub Turloughmore (Hurley, 2019, p.32). This would have been the route taken by Mass goers from Mirah who went to Lackagh church starting by Shaughnessy's house, through Gurraun, Monard and Turloughmore Common, out onto the road by Cullinane's house and on up Carnoneen Hill to the church (Lackagh Turloughmore Parish History Committee, 1990, p.55). **Mass path (7)** from Fox's house in Monard and **Mass path (8)** from Mitchell's house converge with **mass path (6)** at Turloughmore. **Mass path (9)** skirts the western side of the Common (Figure 5) from *Puiteachán* (a little pool or well) entering the road at Cullinane's gate across from Fallon's Public House. It is proposed that this path is more likely to have been used by customers to Fallon's Public House rather than as a path to Mass as the roadway would have been a shorter and more direct route.



**Figure 5** Stile, Mass Path 9 (image authors' own)

**Mass path (10)** remains particularly well defined (Figure 6) and runs from *Tobar Suibhne* (St. Suibhne's Well) with a link westwards to Grange footbridge over the Clare River. A link northwards through Coolarne veers east coming out at Moinín Road (the road of the small bog) opposite the 'Half Moon House', which was the old Parochial House situated on the main road .

Mass goers near to the Grange footbridge had the choice of several Mass paths (10 or 11 or 12). The OSI 6" Cassini map documents flooding on both sides of the River Clare which probably dictated the route taken. Reflecting McFarlane's thoughts on the different characteristics of paths (MacFarlane, 2013, p.14), the routes along Mass paths varied from place to place, mostly dictated by the topography of the land and the type of terrain. But additionally, the route used would often be dictated by the time of year and the conditions of the ground. Some Mass paths were more established than others if there was only one way to go (Forde Interview, 2019). Wet winters often caused the river to expand into the turloughs and floodplains of Lackagh parish



Figure 6 Part of Mass Path 10 (image authors' own)

(Hurley, 2017, p.8). Despite a large system of drainage in the mid-1800s, which included the re-routing of the river, flooding continued throughout the early 1900s (Hurley, 2017, p.9) when many of the Mass paths would still have been in use.

Mass goers from the Rathfee (the heathery fort) area would also have walked up Coolarne lands near Jimmy Burke's and across to the *Moinín* and on to Lackagh (Lackagh Turloughmore Parish History Committee, 1990, p.55).

**Mass path (11)** from Grange footbridge following the eastern bank of the river up by Salmon 'Town' (an area of the riverbank) entering the main road at Lackagh Bridge. Monica Holland used to walk this path in all kinds of weather in her bare feet. She would tie her shoes together and throw them over her shoulder bringing a rag or a towel to wipe her feet before putting on her ankle socks and her shoes. She remembered people also using the path to go to Kearney's shop. Monica walked from the Grange footbridge and 'climbed up a bit of a hill' to get onto Grange's land. She then walked along by the fields in Grange's land, crossed the road and walked down a *bothrín* (small narrow lane), eventually coming out 'at an angle' in Burke's land taking the corner off the field, something not identified on the original OS map. They then crossed into Egan's land, followed by Graney's land to come out at a stile by Kearney's. They named the field by the stile 'the long acre' because it was a very big, long field. The stile was one of two very close by to one another. She remembers that there was one stile for the Mass goers

from Cregmore and another for those from Grange and Cahernashelleeny (the town of the cherries). There was less than the width of a gate between the two stiles which both remain in situ but are now inaccessible (Grealish Interview, 2019). Mass goes from each direction would often stand and talk at the side of the two stiles (Holland Interview, 2019). Through affect, fragments of subjectivity, memory and purpose are deposited in place (Duff, 2010, 892). Long residence enables us to know a place intimately, yet its image may lack sharpness unless we can reflect upon our own experience (Tuan, 2007, p.18). Similar to Jardine Brown's findings during her research of Greenham and Crookham Commons in London (Jardine Brown, 2012), the distance of both time and space enabled Monica to gain critical distance in her memories of the Mass path. Affect helped to sharpen her sense of the path's particularities in her mapping of its route and particular features as well as the practices, activities and people encountered.

**Mass path (12)** from the Cregmore and Grange areas where the path went down the fields from the Cregmore road past Cavanagh's, over the footbridge on the river, veering left in Cahernashelleeny and up to Lackabeg to the site of the old castle at Carnoneen and then on to Lackagh Church (Figure 7). The people returned by Salmon Town (Lackagh Turloughmore Parish History Committee, 1990, p.55). Both Mary Fallon and Monica Holland remember that the steps to Carnoneen castle, which is no longer there, were shiny from regular use (Fallon Go-Along, 2019; Holland Interview, 2019). Robinson (2003) highlighted the changing landscape and loss of cultural features within his research in the west of Ireland. Today Carnoneen castle has been replaced by Flynn's sheds.

**Mass path (13)** from Cahernashelleeny Road northwards to join with **Mass path (12)**. Mary Fallon walked this path on a go-along and was able to reveal several specific landscape elements. Mary remembers others joining the path at Moylan's. They would then take a little road that led them on to the old churchyard. Demonstrating the diverse nature of Mass paths, she said that people also walked the Mass path to go to confession, which they had to go to once a month, and also when missionaries visited the church. This path was



**Figure 7** Part of Mass path 12 (*image authors' own*)

also used by people to go to the local shop and children used it going to school, mostly from the Cahernashelleeny area (Fallon Go-Along, 2019).

The past is present in places materially but also in resonance, whether actually from the past or re-inserted as a self-conscious building in of 'local character' (Massey, 1995, p.187). Just as Sáenz de Tejada Granados and Van der Horst (2020) found in their research in Midlothian (Scotland), conducting and mapping out the go-along interview with local residents revealed the rich and diverse memories that can be associated with seemingly ordinary landscape features such as Mass paths. While the path may no longer be visible, it remains present in the narrative and imagery of this long-term resident. In walking round the area with Mary, the Mass path and fields prompted recollections of place attachment, demonstrating an active connection between body, landscape and memory. Similar to research findings by Jones and Evans (2012, p.2323) in Birmingham (England), walking also allowed oral-history-type recollections to be connected to a specific place, in this case a specific Mass path.

**Mass path (14)** also from Cahernashelleeny northwards before joining with **Mass path (15)**, which is from Kiltroge (Church of St Trog) village into Cahernashelleeny, Caraunkeelwy (the round hill of the narrow plain) and a corner of Knockdoemore, before entering the site of old chapel at the back of Flynn's 'Bull Field' (Hurley, 2019, p.32). **Mass path (16)** runs parallel to the Lackagh Road from Keith Fahy's house which was built in 1842 and is close by to a place known as *Sceachuímhurchú* which translates as Murphy's hedge. A cobbler had his house and workshop nearby.

## 4. Discussions

Research into social or cultural memory has become a major field of inquiry throughout the humanities and social sciences, especially in geography (Hoelscher and Alderman, 2006, p.347) and the constitutive relationship between memory and place is most obvious within the context of the landscape (Hoelscher and Alderman, 2006, p.350). Ó Ciosáin (2004) describes 'local' memory as 'straightforward recollection'. Consisting of stories based solely upon local knowledge or interest, often featuring named individuals. Ó Ciosáin describes these stories and descriptions as atomised and fragmentary. However, he acknowledges that there is often some form of mnemonic involved attaching the story to a specific place or building or some other point in the landscape (p.3). During the personal interviews, interviewees were able to provide the names of land and property owners and routes taken with precision and clarity, as the following transcript demonstrates.

'The Mass path now, they made a short cut. They came down the road from Lisheen [an abbreviation for Lisheenavalla] ... below Byrne's, down one side of Michael Greaney's, down across Cullinane's, straight down with the wall and crossed into Flynn's from Shaughnessy's and Caulfield's ... there was a corner at Cullinane's ... a corner, into Flynn's, down Flynn's *bóithrín*. Now when you went down the middle of Flynn's *bóithrín*, there where the new houses are started, there was a big stile there and you went down

across to Cregg [abbreviation for Cregmore]. There was two stiles there then; there was one for the Cregmores [Cregmore people] and there was one for the Granges [people from Grange]. Now if you came from Grange you came over the *auld brigeen* (the old little bridge); they had to come from this way, that way and this way to the bridge. So, from the bridge you came down along, you came over the bridge, you came down through old Turlough just straight across ... down across the corner of Burns', and John Kenny's, a corner of John Kenny's, right across down to Patty Geoghegan. Next was Martin Greaney's and next was Matt McDermott's barn. And they went down across that way. Oh yes, they went down then until they joined below – you know where the double fencing is down at Flynn's? – there's two stiles there if you look' (Grealish Interview, 2019).

The interviews and go-alongs helped to map the Mass paths more accurately from those outlined on the Ordnance Survey and Google Earth maps used in the workshops. As Lowenthal asserts, memory and artefacts provide differing, but complimentary, routes to the past (Lowenthal, 1979, 106) and visible sites and monuments help us to locate the remembered and imagined past through the present-day landscape (Lowenthal, 1979, p.121). Memory and place are woven into the fabric of everyday life, often through commemorative practices which can be simple acts such as naming streets (Azaryahu, 1996, p.311). Sensibility towards the past is demonstrated in the car park of University Hospital in county Galway which is situated at the entrance to a Mass path. The road name *Cosán an Aifrinn* (Mass path) is named in commemoration of this (Figure 8). During the workshop mnemonics from other members of the community often prompted additional stories and place memories that helped to identify specific markers along the Mass paths both natural and built.



**Figure 8** Street Sign, University Hospital, Galway (*image authors' own*)

As the past decays, both physically and within memory, it is important to make the most of those relics that survive, ensuring that they are celebrated and heralded, protected, restored and recreated (Lowenthal, 1979, p.109). Using data collected from archival study, the workshop, personal interviews and go-alongs, it was possible to undertake subsequent field research to identify, map and record the remaining tangible assets of the Mass path routes such as stiles, stone walls and gates, many of which had become overgrown and no longer visible within the modern-day landscape. Cissie Commins was

able to identify Mannion's barn on the Lackagh Road where she and others would change into their good clothes and shoes before Mass (Commons Interview, 2019). Sean Walsh remembered the Mannion's cottage being used as a thoroughfare by the Mass goers rather than using the stile (Walsh Go-along, 2019). Sean Walsh identified the Thunder field, Monica Holland recalled the Long Acre field (Holland Interview, 2019) and Peter Farragher identified a field of hazelnut trees just down from *Teach Mor* (the big house) on top of Knockdoe Hill (Farragher Interview, 2019). MacFarlane (2013) has shown how the history of our countryside and the people that live in it can be read in the paths that meander across our landscapes and throughout the interviews, concern for the potential loss of the Mass paths was evident. As Murphy has shown, people create very deep and meaningful attachments to places which are strengthened by the activities, events and communities associated with those places. The importance of preserving rights of way is especially pertinent in Ireland not only to protect the public belonging to such historical land use but also to allow the continued use of the Irish countryside as highlighted by bodies such as Keep Ireland Open.

In Lackagh, data revealed that those Mass paths emanating in the western and southern boundaries of the parish terminated at the church whilst some of those coming from the south, as well as those travelling from the east, joined the Lackagh Road at points between The Copper Beech pub and Lackagh Bridge. Where the people had to cross from field to field, stone stiles were erected (Hurley, 2019, p.26) or walls were 'knocked' to ease their passage (Commins Interview, 2019). Stepping-stones would be placed in streams (Slattery Go-along, 2019) and planks provided across ditches (Meath Chronicle, 2007, p.18).

The 'in conversation' approach of the community workshop allowed for a deeper and more profound exploration into the history of the parish and the Mass paths that were walked by generations of local people. Each person was able to discuss their own experiences and memories of the Mass paths including their location and nature. The personal interviews and go-alongs that followed offered an opportunity to gain further insight into the relationships between the past and the present, people and place. Monica Holland remembered that in the past Mass goers would often stand and talk at the stiles (Holland Interview, 2019) and Peter Farragher commented that people did not hurry home from Mass 'in those days' but would take time to stay and have a chat. He lamented that people were too busy now, that in the present people simply did not have the time (Farragher Interview, 2019). Intimate encounters with the landscape feature throughout the conversations, interviews and go-alongs, creating a literal sense of place. They also infer a sense of belonging in that the Mass paths are remembered as an important part of Lackagh's religious heritage.

As locations of a distinctively Catholic faith Mass paths and the memories associated with walking these historic routes have helped to reinforce the personal identity of those that used them. Walking the Mass paths could be a solitary affair where the Rosary was often recited (Commins Interview, 2019) or a community activity where groups from different townlands met along the way and travelled to Mass together (Fallon

Go-along, 2019), thus reinforcing collective identities. Religion involves the collective identity of a people and has strong affinities with the traditions and knowledge handed down from generation to generation (Cusack, 2011, p.2) often orally. Oral history can provide unique insights into the history of places, often providing narratives about the recollection of self, relationships with others and place, insights rarely provided in such depth by other methods. They can be of great benefit in geographical enquiry and this research has shown that such histories can be used as effective tools for geographical mapping and analysis, particularly where topographical features no longer exist, or where few observable landscape features remain. Using a mixed methodology it was possible to accurately map the Mass paths in the parish of Lackagh and identify and record a number of previously unrecorded features. Subsequent field research revealed a wayside cross beside a new housing estate and a second unknown stile at the *brigeen* north of the village. An additional Mass path, that ran in parallel to the Lackagh Road at Keith Fahy's, whose house was built in 1842, was also identified.

## 5. Conclusions

For Robinson, on Inishmore in the west of Ireland, walking was the necessary mode of discovery (Wall, 2008, p.71). The mere act of walking afforded opportunities for encountering locals, conversing, listening and observing (Wylie, 2012, p.370) and it formed the primary building block of his methodology (Wall, 2008, p.76). Being on and walking along the Mass paths was key to how they were remembered and experienced and the results show that the knowledge of the local residents is unquestionably rich and relevant in understanding the diverse values which people place on landscapes. As McGovern and Mebane-Cruz state, simply recording memories detached from sites or preserving sites without stories of the people who live there presents a shallow representation (McGovern and Mebane-Cruz, 2019, p.142). A mere survey of a route 'will miss what was: the act itself of passing by, causing a way of being in the world to be forgotten' (De Certeau, 1988, p.97).

This research used a case study approach in Lackagh, County Galway where the authors used an assemblage of methods to record and photograph the Mass paths in the parish. The methodology proved to be a key strength of the project, helping to more accurately map the Mass path routes, but also revealing the social habits, traditions, rituals, meanings and experiences associated with the Mass paths. There are burgeoning scholarly and policy debates about the benefits of living heritage and the justification for its preservation and protection. The results of this research provide a body of data that reflects both a traditional and values-attributed approach to living heritage that will assist policy makers to make more informed decisions in respect to heritage policy in Ireland.

Bergeron et al (2014) point out that there is an urgent need for developing innovative and productive methods for revealing the implicit meanings attached to places and for facilitating community input and participation. The methodology has provided a broad

template that can be successfully replicated and applied in geographical research at a local, national and international level. Whilst research focussed on a single parish, the possibility of replicating the processes and methods used within the research to encompass other places and communities is clear. The interviews and go-alongs recorded along the Mass paths in Lackagh offer rich primary material for further study and the researcher hopes to eventually combine all the data to produce one single comprehensive and multi-layered interface to create a nexus of narrative geographical and visual data rather than just a one-dimensional visual map.

## Acknowledgements:

This research was funded by Liverpool John Moores University and the British Academy under a British Academy/Leverhulme Small Research Grant.

I am extremely grateful to the local community in Lackagh for their generosity of time and spirit and to the landowners of Lackagh parish for allowing me access to their land. Special thanks goes to Lackagh Heritage Committee for facilitating this research, in particular Michael Hurley, Frank Kearney and Jerry McDonough.

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