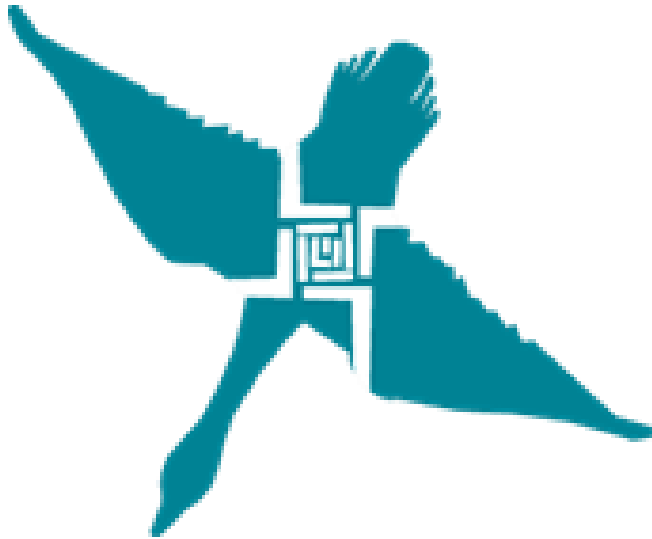


Brigid's Way: How does it Compare with Similarly Dedicated Pilgrim Practice in the Middle Ages and Modern Era to and between Faughart and Kildare?



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to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David

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All material in this dissertation which is not my own work has been identified and acknowledged.

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Abstract

Brigid's Way, established in 2012, is a pilgrimage route from Faughart to Kildare commemorating Brigid, Irish saint and pre-Christian goddess. The aim of this paper is the creation of two comparable depictions of pilgrimage associated with Brigid of Ireland and a subsequent analysis of the routes, sites, rituals, and purpose. The first portrayal belongs to the medieval and early modern past and the second portrayal is that of this new pilgrimage route and its pilgrims. Hagiography, folkloric and historical texts, and contemporary accounts are utilised in a mixed qualitative approach to establish the narratives of pilgrimage form and function. The findings reveal there are differences between past pilgrimages and Brigid's Way, both in the structure of the pilgrimages and in the meaning made of associated pilgrim practices. The similarities indicate a continued yet evolving pilgrimage tradition and Brigid's enduring cultural and spiritual significance.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Her for inspiring it. Thank you to me for walking it. Thank you to those who encouraged the writing of it.

Chapter One: Introduction

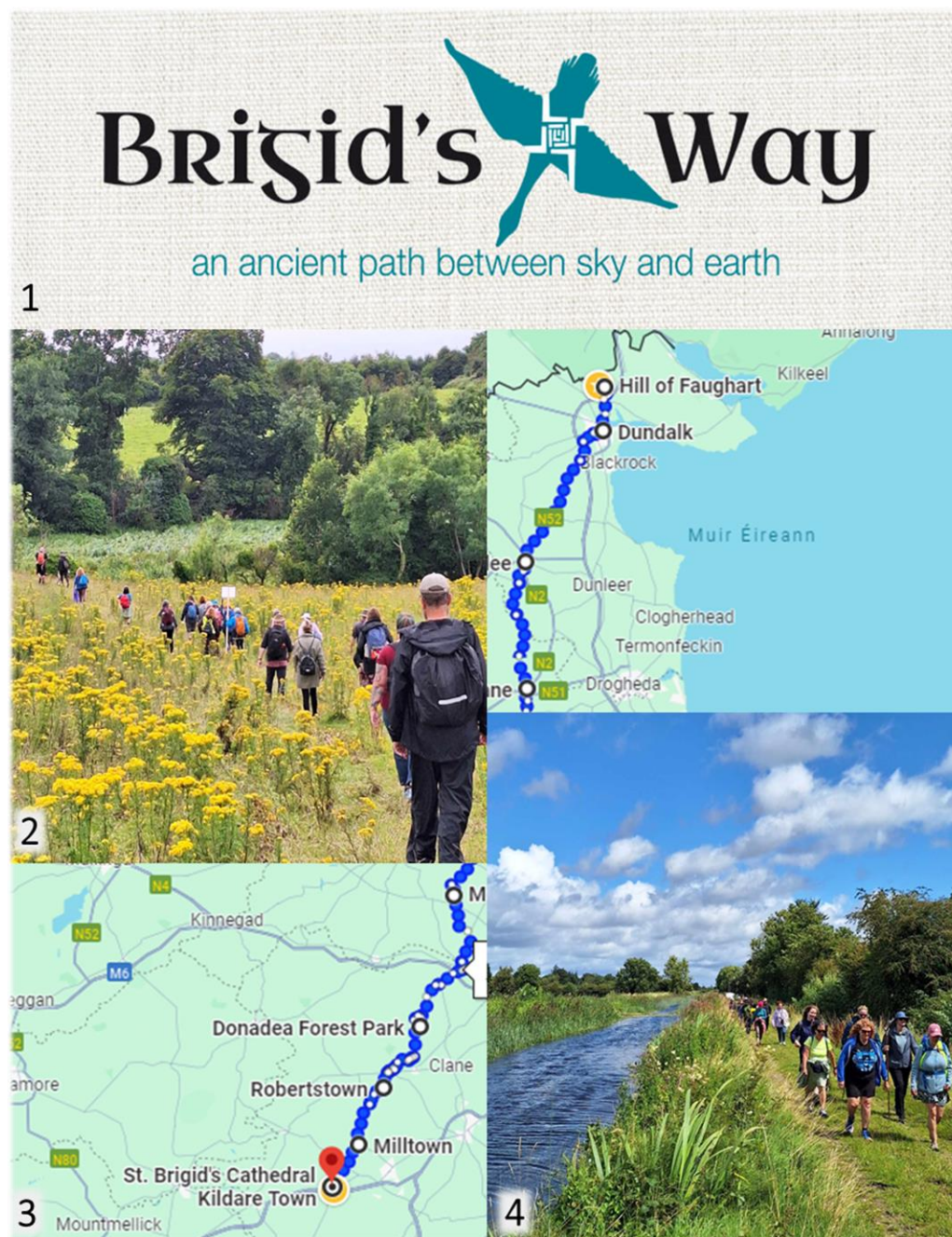


Fig. 1 – Brigid's Way: A pilgrimage from Faughart to Kildare.¹

¹ Fig. 1: 1 - Brigid's Way Banner for website and social media, Brigid's Way, *Brigid's Way* (2022) <<https://brigidsway.ie/>> [accessed 1st February 2024]. Fig. 1: 2 and 4 - Pilgrims on Day One and Day Eight of Brigid's Way in July 2023, Heidi Wyldewood, *Photographs*, 2023. All photographs containing depictions of pilgrims taken by Heidi Wyldewood and used in this paper have appeared prior in the public domain and the author has permission to use them here. Fig. 1: 3 - Brigid's Way route from Google Maps, 'Hill Of Faughart To St. Brigid's Cathedral Kildare Town', *Google Maps* (2024) <<https://maps.app.goo.gl/4Pcc4o9CBVuvZCt99>> [created and accessed 7th June 2024].

Brigid, one of Ireland's national icons, often portrayed in modern contexts as a composite figure, that of a pre-Christian goddess and a fifth century saint, is having a major revival.² A campaign spearheaded by Herstory in 2019, to make Brigid's Day Ireland's new national holiday, was successful.³ Beginning in the autumn of 2023, a program of events was rolled out across Ireland culminating around the new national holiday on 5th February 2024 and the millennium and a half anniversary of the saint's life.⁴ The profile of Brigid has been rising steadily again over the past thirty years, perhaps rekindled along with the Brigid Flame of Kildare in 1993 which has been tended since by Christians, pagans, and feminists alike.⁵ In the midst of this increased Brigid-inspired activity, a pilgrimage dedicated to her was created in Ireland by a group of devotees. In 2012, a talk given by Founder 1 was the catalyst, and the pilgrimage was simultaneously born in the hearts and minds of Founder 2 and Founder 3 who were in attendance (Appendices A, B and C). Together, Founder 2 and Founder 3 formulated a long-distance route in honour of Brigid, who for them is both the Celtic mythological goddess and the woman of faith who became an early spiritual leader of the Irish church. The pilgrimage route begins in Faughart, County Louth, the purported birthplace of the saint, and finishes in Kildare Town, County Kildare, where her monastery was established (Fig. 1: 3). Both places have longstanding traditions associated with the saint. The walk takes in several wells and churches sacred to Brigid and passes via the historical ancient monuments on the Hill of Slane and the Hill of Tara. The suggested walk time is nine days for the approximate one-hundred-and-fifty kilometers end to end. The founding group feel their pilgrimage to be a reimagining of an 'ancient path between sky and earth' and the pilgrimage logo or emblem, a Brigid's Cross superimposed onto the shape of a flying swan, aims to embody that meaning (Fig. 1 : 1).⁶ Since its inception when it was first walked in 2013 by Founder 2 and Founder 3, and a group of pilgrims, Brigid's Way as a facilitated pilgrimage has been offered every July (Fig. 1: 1-5).⁷ The route is outlined on their website for those who wish to walk at other times. The volunteer group is currently seeking official signage for Brigid's Way so that it stands alongside other recognised pilgrimage routes in Ireland (Appendices B and C).

This paper sets out to compare this newly instigated pilgrimage, Brigid's Way, with medieval and earlier modern pilgrim practice at Faughart and Kildare, and to probe the idea inferred by the tag, 'ancient path', that of former pilgrim practice linking these two places directly or of pilgrim practice in the area between the terminal points. A good proportion of the paper presents a substantial relevant history regarding Faughart and Kildare to provide background to the discussion of pilgrimages past and present. The comparative analysis is divided into two aspects of pilgrimage: form and function. Pilgrimage form comprises the physical route and any ritualised behaviour undertaken by the pilgrim as they pass through the landscape via towns or villages, and at sacred sites. The function of the pilgrimage, the purpose of the journey, encompasses pilgrim and community intention, experience, reflection, and perceived benefits.

² Mary Condren, 'Brigit, Matron Of poetry, Healing, Smithwork And Mercy: Female Divinity In A European Wisdom Tradition', *Journal Of The European Society Of Women In Theological Research*, 18 (2010), 5-29 (pp. 6-8) <doi:10.2143/ESWTR.18.0.0000000> [accessed 11th February 2024].

³ Herstory, Brigid's Day Is Ireland's New National Holiday, *Herstory*, (2024) <<https://www.herstory.ie/brigidsday>> [accessed 10th February 2024].

⁴ Brigid 1500, *Brigid 1500*, (2024) <<https://brigid1500.ie/>> [accessed 30th January 2024].

⁵ Rita Minehan, *Rekindling The Flame: A Pilgrimage In The Footsteps Of Brigid Of Kildare*, rev. edn. (Kildare, Ireland: Solas Bhríde Spirituality Centre And Hermitages, 2022), p. 18.

⁶ Brigid's Way, *Brigid's Way*, 2022.

⁷ The pilgrimage was not offered or facilitated in the summers impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic (Appendix B).

Whilst the investigation is focused on pilgrimages by devotees of Brigid as a saint, acknowledged is the pre-Christian goddess as important to many modern pilgrims (Appendix D). It is also noted that whilst the veneration of Brigid is supported by longstanding tradition, the saint herself has a disputed history. The research aims here are not to debate or verify the life of the saint or to disentangle the two Brigids but to discuss the shape and operation of pilgrimage born out of spiritual values and tradition and to identify any similarities and differences between those of the past and that offered by Brigid's Way now. An additional value in this comparison is the documenting of hearsay and oral tradition, both old and newly emerging. The conclusion provides a framework in which Brigid's Way, a modern pilgrimage, sits comfortably against the backdrop of recorded history and the fragments of local lore that inspired and informed it.

Chapter Two: Methodology



Fig. 2 – Bronze statue of Brigid, created by Annette McCormack, at St. Brigid's Garden Well, near Kildare Town, adorned with Brigid's Crosses and flowers left by visitors during the Brigid's Day celebrations in February 2017.⁸

⁸ Fig. 2 - Wyldewood, *Photographs*, 2017. For the bronze statue see Kildare Town Heritage Centre for Silken Thomas, *Kildare Footprints: Kildare Walking Tour And Heritage Trail*, (Kildare, Ireland: Kildare Town Heritage Centre, 2023), p. 33 <<https://silken-thomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/kildare-footprints.pdf>> [accessed 23rd May 2024].

The comparison relies on a mix of qualitative research methods. A bottom-up approach has been taken via the gathering of relevant past and present observations followed by the formulation of two comparable accounts of pilgrimage rooted in data.⁹ It is recognised that historical and experiential narratives regarding saints, spiritual and religious practice, local lore, and personal endeavour are subjective to varying degrees. Therefore, the goal has been to deliver an interpretation of pilgrimage form based on accepted history, academic expertise, and documented record, and to gain a depth of understanding regarding pilgrimage function by way of the same, with the addition of primary and secondary sources of pilgrims' own perspective. Regarding the latter a phenomenological approach is taken, therefore the pilgrim experience is presented without explanation or judgement.¹⁰

Ethnography and autoethnography as valid forms of data collection, and the 'roots of qualitative research', justify the inclusion of the author's photographs and observations pertaining to visits to Brigid-related sites in Ireland in February 2017 and their personal experience of the guided nine-day pilgrimage offered by Brigid's Way group in July 2023 (Fig. 2).¹¹ These observations are referenced as 'Personal Informal Observation'. The author, as one of Brigid's Way's volunteers, has attempted to minimise personal bias and generalisations whilst gathering and interpreting the narratives and in the presentation of the comparison, however, 'no single perspective is perfect or exhaustive in its understanding or importance' and conclusions drawn are always marginally subjective in nature.¹²

To establish places and pilgrim practices associated with Brigid as an abbess and saint, hagiography and historical texts are presented, along with evidence of evolving traditions and folklore. Key primary sources referenced in regard to the life of the saint are two seventh century texts: the *Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae* as translated by Seán Connolly, and Cogitosus' 'Life of Saint Brigid' as translated by Robert Rochford and Father John Colgan in the book introduced by Phillip Campbell, 'The Life of St. Brigid of Kildare by Cogitosus and Other Selected Writings'.¹³ Use has been made of publications by scholars and experts, such as Noel Kissane's 'Saint Brigid of Kildare' and Louise Nugent's 'Journeys of Faith' to expand the discussion of primary sources and to further the understanding of religious practice and pilgrimage in context.¹⁴ To gather information about more recent pilgrim practice or Brigid-related folklore in the subject area, the National Folklore Collection UCD (Dúchas), particularly The Schools' Collection, is an example of the kind of primary source used, where search terms such as a village name or the likes of 'Brigid Walk' or holy well' are moderately successful in narrowing down the list of entries.¹⁵ Secondary sources, such as archaeological reports or peer-reviewed articles have been relied upon to supplement the primary sources, particularly in the matter of understanding how

⁹ Svend Brinkmann, Michael Hviid Jacobsen and Søren Kristiansen, 'Historical Overview Of Qualitative Research In The Social Sciences', *The Oxford Handbook Of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edn., ed. by Patricia Leavy (New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 22-58 (p. 47).

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 30.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 40-41. All photographs of Brigid's Way pilgrims taken by the author have appeared in the public domain prior to this paper and the author has permission to include them here also.

¹² Susan A. Tucker and others, 'Conducting Mixed Methods Research: Using Dialectical Pluralism And Social Psychological Strategies', *The Oxford Handbook Of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edn., ed. by Patricia Leavy, (New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 836-874 (p. 837).

¹³ Seán Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae', *The Journal Of The Royal Society Of Antiquaries Of Ireland*, 119 (1989), 14-49 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25508969>> [accessed 20th April 2023]. For the translation of *Vita II* see Cogitosus, 'Life Of Saint Brigid The Virgin', *The Life Of St. Brigid Of Kildare By Cogitosus And Other Selected Writings*, ed. by Jesse Griffiths, (Michigan, USA: Cruachan Hill Press, 2022), pp. 61-88.

¹⁴ Noel Kissane, *Saint Brigid Of Kildare: Life, Legend And Cult*, (Dublin, Ireland: Four Courts Press, 2017). Louise Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith: Stories Of Pilgrimage From Medieval Ireland*, (Dublin, Ireland: Columba Books, 2020).

¹⁵ National Folklore Collection, *National Folklore Collection, UCD* (2024) <<https://www.duchas.ie/en>> [accessed 18th February 2024].

specific sites were used or adapted over periods of time. Many of these articles were found through JSTOR or Google Scholar using variations of precise and relevant search terms. In addition to reaching out to local archaeological and historical societies such as the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society (CLAHS) and the Allen Area Historical and Heritage Group, who could not offer further information at this time, the author also contacted scholars known for their work on Irish history or about Brigid, such as Barry Lewis at the Dublin Institute For Advanced Studies (DIAS), who pointed out that St Bernard of Clairvaux had made mention of Faughart, and Mary Condren of Trinity College Dublin, who informed that the Traveller community made regular visits to the shrine at Faughart.

The discussion about the form and function of Brigid's Way has been primarily based on material found on the Brigid's Way website at www.brigidsway.ie, such as the day-by-day route guide, and on the information and insights given by the founders of the pilgrimage and some of the pilgrims themselves. Ethical approval to conduct interviews with the founders and issue a questionnaire to pilgrims was initially sought from the dissertation supervisor Jane Cartwright, then the form PG2 Application For Ethical Approval was submitted, and approval was given by the university. In accordance with that all the transcripts have been anonymised. The interviews took place via Zoom so recordings could be made. Transcripts of the interviews were made possible by uploading the audios to the Microsoft Word transcription tool and are found in the Appendices, having been edited for grammatical errors, repetition, and the preservation of anonymity for other interviewees. Three of the founders of the pilgrimage have been interviewed regarding the process of creating the pilgrimage; their understanding of Brigid; and their hopes for and observations of pilgrim experience whilst walking their facilitated pilgrimage. The transcript of interviews with Founder 1, Founder 2, and Founder 3 are found in Appendices A to C. Additionally, 'Landowner' in Dundalk, was interviewed regarding the section of Brigid's Way which traverses her land. Present too in that Zoom call was 'Guide' who leads pilgrims over the land and shares his knowledge about the area and the archaeological features on the land with them. The interview transcript is found in Appendix G. Nine of the pilgrims who walked Brigid's Way in 2023 were asked if they would answer a questionnaire about their experience. Eight responded, affirming their intention to answer the questions, but only five did so. Four sent back their written answers to the questionnaire via email and one requested a Zoom call, which was transcribed in the same manner as previously outlined. The pilgrim responses, including the questions, are available in Appendix H.

Lastly, there have been various spellings recorded for the name of the saint over the centuries and the sources used display some variation, however 'Brigid' is the form used throughout this paper.¹⁶ Other name forms, including those preceded by 'Saint' or 'St' are retained in direct quotations. Other saints mentioned will be preceded by 'St' in the first instance only, unless the first or subsequent mention is a direct quotation which uses a different form.

¹⁶ Kissane, *Saint Brigid Of Kildare*, pp. 20-21.

Chapter Three: Brigid of Faughart and Kildare



Fig. 3 – Pilgrim visiting Brigid's Cathedral in Kildare town; Brigid's Garden Well and the Rag Tree at Tully, outside Kildare Town; and Brigid's Well and the Rag Tree on the Hill of Faughart.¹⁷

¹⁷ Fig.3: 1 - Wyldewood, *Photographs*, 2017. Fig.3: 2 and 3 - Wyldewood, *Photographs*, 2023.

Faughart

The Hill of Faughart is situated a few kilometers north of Dundalk, in Co. Louth (Appendix F: Fig. 1). Today Faughart Upper is the site of church ruins and a graveyard in which a well dedicated to Brigid can be found, and on Faughart Lower stands St. Brigid's Shrine and Oratory (Fig. 2:3 and Appendix E. Fig 1). The early *Vitas* do not name the place in which Brigid was born (Appendix D). Cogitosus states she was born into the 'good and most accomplished tribe of Eochu' on her father's side.¹⁸ The tradition for Faughart being the birthplace of Brigid is thought to have originally stemmed from the similarity between the words *Focherd* (Faughart) and *Fothairt*, which refers to the tribe which is thought to be Brigid's kin (Appendix D).¹⁹ Another early connection with Faughart comes via Darerca or Dairerca, later called Moninne or Monenna, a saint contemporary with, and close friend of, Brigid, who even stayed with her for a time at Kildare.²⁰ Moninne established her community on the Hill of Faughart, prior to moving on to Killeevy, Slieve Gullion.²¹ Only one nun remained in charge of Faughart when Moninne left, so presumably the foundation's subsequent use or prominence at that time was diminished.²² Some texts call Moninne *Brigida Segunda*, a 'second Brigid or second after Brigid'.²³ Later suppositions that Moninne's monastery in Faughart was dedicated to Brigid seem unlikely given that they were contemporaries.

Only a few centuries later, however, there was no doubt about Brigid's connection with Faughart. In the twelfth century a 'redaction of *Vita Prima*' and Bernard of Clairvaux's 'Life of St Malachy of Armagh' both name it as her birthplace.²⁴ It is possible that the promotion of Brigid at Faughart was initially due to political or religious assertion of dominance, and undoubtedly the connection with Brigid, tenuous or otherwise, 'was primarily recognised and promoted long before the twelfth century, by the Conaille Muirthemne' who used the wider site as a 'ritual landscape' for burial, inauguration and spiritual matters.²⁵ Faughart is in a strategic position, just south of Moyry Pass, sometimes referred to as the 'Gap of the North', and any monastic foundation there 'would have been part of the dynastic claims and counterclaims in the struggle for supremacy in the area'.²⁶

¹⁸ Cogitosus, 'Life Of Saint Brigid The Virgin', 1, p. 63.

¹⁹ Kissane, *Saint Brigid Of Kildare*, pp. 27 and 104-105.

²⁰ Maeve Brigid Callan, *Sacred Sisters: Gender, Sanctity, And Power In Medieval Ireland*, (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), pp. 63-69.

²¹ Callan, *Sacred Sisters*, p. 68. For Moninne, known for her ascetism, retreating from the noise at Faughart and moving her monastery to Killeevy, see Diane Peters Auslander, 'Ethnicity In Hagiography: The Case Of Darerca/Moninna/Modwenna/Modwenne In The British Isles, Seventh To Thirteenth Centuries', (Unpublished PhD: City University of New York, 2010) pp. 4 and 117
<<https://www.proquest.com/dissertations/docview/761440422/135AA241C3A14EC3140/271>> [accessed 10th April 2024].

²² Callan, *Sacred Sisters*, p. 77. See also Auslander, 'Ethnicity In Hagiography', p. 158.

²³ Callan, *Sacred Sisters*, pp. 104-105.

²⁴ Kissane, *Saint Brigid Of Kildare*, p. 105.

²⁵ In Moninne's day Faughart was part of the lands associated with the Conaille Muirthemne, extending north into Armagh and south into Louth. Later, a division of the area occurred between Faughart (including the ecclesiastical site) and Dundalk, see Gill Boazman, 'The Material Culture Of Self-Promotion: The Conaille Muirthemne Kings And The Ecclesiastical Site Of Faughart, County Louth', *Journal Of The County Louth Archaeological And Historical Society*, 28.3 (2015), 327-350 (pp. 327-334)
<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/44508599>> [accessed 10th April]. For ritual landscape, see pp. 345-349.

²⁶ Auslander, 'Ethnicity In Hagiography', p. 44. For Moyry Pass, see P. W. Joyce, 'A Smaller Social History Of Ireland: Treating Of The Government, Military System, And Law; Religion, Learning And Art; Trades, Industries, And Commerce; Manners, Customs And Domestic Life Of The Ancient Irish People – Chapter XXIV', *Library*

Control of Faughart meant control of the main road, the Slighe Miudhluachra, passing through that gap (Appendix G).²⁷ The Slighe Miudhluachra ran via the Hill of Slane to the Hill of Tara as one of five ancient royal roads.²⁸ Although these routeways were used in the Bronze Age they continued to be developed and maintained in the medieval era and are followed in part by modern roads.²⁹

Material evidence for Faughart Upper determines that settlement and usage belongs to the early Middle Ages.³⁰ The double concentric ring enclosure is fitting for an ecclesiastic settlement of the time, although the location is unusual.³¹ Two 'tapered stone-lined cists' on the site are consistent with seventh century burials.³² Souterrain ware indicates use of the site between the seventh and thirteenth centuries and documentary evidence suggests ecclesiastical use throughout the same period.³³ Conflicting descriptions for the church, '*tempeall Focháirde*' (tempeall – stone church) and '*durthaig Fochart*' (durthaig – wooden church), were written in the eighth century.³⁴ The ruins of the late medieval church are all that remains today. Unusually its door is to the west, and its style looks to 'replicate' or 'memorialise a previous stone church' of the twelfth century.³⁵ Also found in the graveyard are an early medieval 'cross-slab, high cross base and central boss of a high cross', but the features likely to have been an early focus for Brigid devotees are the holy well, a mound, and a horseshoe-shaped monument'.³⁶ The well, first recorded in 1744, is situated to the north-west of the church, although the spring beneath could be 'extant from antiquity'.³⁷ It is accessible today via stone steps leading down to a rectangular sump covered by a corbelled conical stone structure.³⁸ A large tree overlooks the well and is hung with items left by visitors (Fig. 3: 3) The circumference of the mound likely marks the position of a long gone round tower or other structure.³⁹ The mound, sometimes called Brigid's Pillar, contains the later addition of the base of medieval cross.⁴⁰ The horseshoe-shaped feature, referred to as Brigid's Bed, contains an early medieval 'large round black stone', with a 'rough, pitted surface' at the centre.⁴¹ A seventeenth century hagiographer remarks on its special powers calling it the '*Bríghida lapis vero, super quam genita est*': the threshold stone, 'The

Ireland: History / Genealogy / Culture, (1906) <<https://www.libraryireland.com/SocialHistoryAncientIreland/III-XXIV-1.php>> [accessed 20th February 2024].

²⁷ Joyce, 'A Smaller Social History Of Ireland'.

²⁸ The *slighe* were roads wide enough for two chariots to pass each other, see Joyce, 'A Smaller Social History Of Ireland'. For the *slighe* as paved highways compared with the *lámrotae* (roads) or the *bóthar* (tracks and drove ways), see Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 107. For the Hill of Tara as an important site since the Stone Age and its significance as the seat of the high kings of Ireland from 600BC to 400AD, see Heritage Ireland, 'Hill Of Tara', *Heritage Ireland*, (2024) <<https://heritageireland.ie/places-to-visit/hill-of-tara/>> [accessed 28th May 2024].

²⁹ Yolande O'Brien and Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland IAI, *The Ancient Roads Of Ireland* [video]. 2021 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9PAInaF9_g> [accessed 28th March 2024].

³⁰ Boazman, 'The Material Culture Of Self-Promotion', p. 336.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p. 337.

³³ Ibid., pp. 337 and 349.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 337-338.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 337.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 338.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Louise Nugent, 'The Modern Pilgrimages At Faughart On The Feast Day Of St Brigit', *Pilgrimage In Medieval Ireland*, (2013) <<https://pilgrimagemedievalireland.com/2013/02/09/the-modern-pilgrimages-at-faughart-on-the-feast-day-of-st-brigit/>> [accessed January 13th 2024].

⁴¹ Boazman, 'The Material Culture Of Self-Promotion', p. 338.

true stone of Brigid, on which she was born'.⁴² This stone is a secondary relic, the like of which became more common at the end of the eighth century, whilst the horseshoe around it is later.⁴³

At Faughart Lower, approximately one and a half kilometres northwest of the Hill of Faughart, St Brigid's Oratory and Shrine can be found (Appendix E: Fig. 1). As the chosen 'National Shrine of St Brigid', the site was redeveloped in 1934. Although a road divides the site, it is verdant and quiet, and Brigid's Stream flows through the site on both sides, passing under the road. The upper section of the site contains many trees; a drinking or blessing water fountain; a Lourdes or Marian-style grotto; and a reliquary shrine which once contained a tiny piece of skull.⁴⁴ The relic, believed to be that of Brigid, is now housed at the nearby parish church in Kilcurry.⁴⁵ An older shrine was replaced in 1934 at the same time as the grotto and several new prayer stations were added. The lower section contains the modern oratory and at the side of the stream through the whole site lie a mixture of modern Stations of the Cross and older prayer or healing stones (Appendix E: Fig).⁴⁶ The older, some say ancient stones, numbered six to ten include: the Hoof Stone, the Knee Stone, the Waist Stone, the Eye or Back Stone, and the Head Stone, and all of these are 'invested with origin legends connected with St Brigit'.⁴⁷

Kildare

Whilst the place of her birth is uncertain, the place of Brigid's death is specifically relayed as Kildare.⁴⁸ Kildare Town lies on high ground overlooking the Curragh plain in County Kildare, approximately fifty kilometers inland and southwest of Dublin and approximately one hundred kilometers south of Dundalk (Appendix F: Fig. 1). The town one of the 'oldest continuously occupied settlements' in Ireland and is well known for its connection to Brigid and for its cathedral bearing her name.⁴⁹ The *Vitas* indicate Brigid founding her monastery of nuns on the same site around 500 AD and Cogitosus describes a double monastery of both monks and nuns there by the seventh century.⁵⁰ Brigid's original church would have been made of wood, most likely oak.⁵¹ The name Kildare means 'church of the oak' (*cill dara*).⁵² By the time Cogitosus was writing he called Kildare a 'city', and no doubt the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 339.

⁴⁴ Louth County Council, 'St. Brigid's Shrine', *Louth: Land Of Legends*, (2017)

<<https://www.visitlouth.ie/explore-and-do/explore-louth/sacred-sites-louth/st-brigids-shrine.html>> [accessed 25th April 2024].

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid. For 'origin legends', see Nugent, 'The Modern Pilgrimages At Faughart On The Feast Day Of St Brigit'.

⁴⁸ Cogitosus, 'Life Of Saint Brigid The Virgin', 37, pp. 87-89. See also Seán Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae', 129.1-2, pp. 48-49.

⁴⁹ Howley Hayes Architects, *Kildare Town Walls: Conservation, Interpretation And Management Plan*, (2014) p. iv

<<https://kildarecoco.ie/AllServices/Heritage/BuiltHeritageArchaeologyandMonuments/IrishWalledTownsNetwork/Kildare%20Town%20Conservation%20Interpretation%20Management%20Plan.pdf>> [accessed 20th April 2024].

⁵⁰ Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 180. For 500 AD, see Kissane, *Saint Brigid Of Kildare*, p.37.

⁵¹ Louise Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith: Stories Of Pilgrimage From Medieval Ireland*, (Dublin, Ireland: Columba Books, 2020), p. 183.

⁵² Howley Hayes Architects, *Kildare Town Walls*, p.1.

church was separated from monastic domestic life and the many other habitations by either a 'ditch, earthen bank or stone wall' at the time, but his description of Kildare as a 'great metropolis' might have been an exaggeration.⁵³ He reports that it was the 'head of virtually all the Irish churches', and it is evident that even those who 'were more invested in Patrick's cult could not afford to ignore Brigid'.⁵⁴ He depicts a rebuilt church in which the bodies of Brigid and her bishop Conleth lie 'left and right of the ornamented altar' and tells that their shrines are of 'gold, silver and precious gems, with gold and silver crowns hanging above them'.⁵⁵ He describes the church as being of 'extreme height' and 'spacious', big enough for the addition of 'three wide chapels' within it.⁵⁶ The church was also internally divided by 'wooden partitions' and 'painted boards' to separate the nuns, monks and mixed congregation, along with an entrance for females on the left and one for males on the right.⁵⁷

It is posited that the remains of Brigid were removed from Kildare due to the threat of Viking activity.⁵⁸ It appears the relics were lost for a time, then supposedly re-discovered in 1185 and translated 'to Downpatrick along with those of Patrick and Columba'.⁵⁹ Sometime after the eighth century the monastery at Kildare had both an inner enclosure, marked today by the cathedral wall, and an outer ecclesiastical enclosure for the domestic space which extended to, and is preserved in the lines of, White Abbey Street to the west, Claregate Street to the south and Nugent Street to the south-east (Appendix F: Fig.2).⁶⁰ The Market Square is probably the site of the 'original early medieval market place' situated at the entrance to the monastery (Appendix F. Fig 2).⁶¹ Although stone churches were not common until the eleventh century, it is possible a stone replacement of the wooden church could have been earlier, given the date of another stone structure in the cathedral grounds.⁶² A stone round tower was constructed during the ninth or tenth century in the north-west of the inner enclosure (Appendix E: Fig. 3 and Appendix F. Fig 2).⁶³ It stands at more than thirty metres in height, and its door is almost five metres above ground level, perhaps providing a way to display relics to visitors.⁶⁴ A cathedral was built as part of the monastic site in the early thirteenth century; added to in the fourteenth, but after the Reformation it fell into disrepair during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and became 'ruined and roofless'.⁶⁵ It was rebuilt in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁶ There was also a gabled structure of which the last remaining wall fell down sometime in the eighteenth century, and all that is left is an unusual stone-built rectangular hollow to

⁵³ Cogitosus, 'Life Of Saint Brigid The Virgin', 37, p. 87. For enclosure boundaries, see Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 181.

⁵⁴ Cogitosus, 'Life Of Saint Brigid The Virgin', p. 62. For Brigid's appearance in the 'Lives' of Patrick versus Patrick's absence in Cogitosus' *Vita*, see Callan, *Sacred Sisters*, p. 89.

⁵⁵ Cogitosus, 'Life Of Saint Brigid The Virgin', 36, p. 85.

⁵⁶ Cogitosus, 'Life Of Saint Brigid The Virgin', 36, pp. 85-86.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Elva Johnston, 'Making St Brigit Real In The Early Middle Ages', *Proceedings Of The Royal Irish Academy*, 124C, (2024), 1–26 (p. 22) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/918428/pdf>> [accessed 19th April 2024].

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 181. For the outer enclosure in White Abbey Street, Claregate Street and Nugent Street, see Clare Crowley, *Archaeological Impact Assessment Report: Kildare Market Square, Kildare Town, Co. Kildare*, (Kildare, Ireland: Metropolitan Workshop Ltd, 2023) p. 1. <<https://kildarecoco.ie/AllServices/Planning/Part8Schemes/StrategicProjectsandPublicRealm/P8202308Part8-ProposedPublicRealmImprovementWorkstoMarketSquareKildareTown/Archaeological%20Impact%20Assessment%20Report.pdf>> [accessed 15th April 2024].

⁶¹ Crowley, *Archaeological Impact Assessment Report: Kildare Market Square*, p. 1.

⁶² Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 183.

⁶³ Crowley, *Archaeological Impact Assessment Report: Kildare Market Square*, p. 8.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 7. For the monastic house in decay, see Howley Hayes Architects, *Kildare Town Walls*, p.8

⁶⁶ Crowley, *Archaeological Impact Assessment Report: Kildare Market Square*, p. 7.

the north of the cathedral (Appendix E: Fig 4).⁶⁷ It is reported to be the site of the 'sacred fire' kept burning from Brigid's day until the sixteenth century, and it is marked as 'Fire house' on a map of 1942 (Appendix F: Fig. 2).⁶⁸ Giraldus Cambrensis attested to this 'fire temple' in his writings of the twelfth century, and although the community of monks had dwindled by that time, the community of nuns persisted till the sixteenth century.⁶⁹

Across the Market Square from the cathedral today lies Kildare Town Heritage Centre and Tourist Office in the restored nineteenth century Market House (Appendix F: Fig. 3). Outside it stands a sculpture which was officially unveiled in 2006 in the presence of Mary McAleese, then President of Ireland, and it represents Brigid's 'Perpetual Flame' which was relit in 1993 by the Brigidine Sisters.⁷⁰ The Brigidine Sisters moved to their new 'Solas Bhríde Centre and Hermitages' on Tully Road in 2015 (Appendix F: Fig. 3 and 4).⁷¹ The centre is home to that same flame, carrying on the tradition, and the nuns welcome 'people of all faiths and no faiths'.⁷² Slightly further on from the centre are two wells dedicated to Brigid, and local tradition holds that she used one of the wells to 'baptise converts' (Appendix F: Fig 3 and 4).⁷³ The current surrounds of the Wayside Well, with its larger pool and narrow stone walkway, were created in 1953, although the well itself is much older and predates the 'garden well' (Fig.3: 2 and Fig. 4: 3).⁷⁴ The garden of the other St Brigid's Well, contains five prayer stones leading up to the well; a rag tree near the well; a stream; two unusual granite cylinders through which the stream flows called Brigid's Slippers or Cows, purported to contain the imprint of the saint; a triple stone arch; and a bronze statue of Brigid (Fig. 2, Fig. 4: 1 and Appendix E: Fig. 5).⁷⁵ The well and garden were renovated in 1952 and the statue was erected much more recently.⁷⁶

⁶⁷ Ibid. For the last remaining wall in 18th c, see Minehan, *Rekindling The Flame*: p. 27.

⁶⁸ Crowley, *Archaeological Impact Assessment Report: Kildare Market Square*, p. 7.

⁶⁹ Callan, *Sacred Sisters*, p. 99.

⁷⁰ Minehan, *Rekindling The Flame*, p. 18.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 12.

⁷² Ibid., p. 18.

⁷³ Kildare Community Stories, 'St. Brigid's Well, Tully, Co. Kildare', [Facebook: video], <<https://www.facebook.com/kildarecommunitystories/videos/1329697027900422>> 30th January 2023 [accessed 10th March 2024].

⁷⁴ Kildare Town Heritage Centre and Silken Thomas, *Kildare Footprints*, p. 31.

⁷⁵ For Brigid's Slippers, see Antoine Giacometti and Gillian Boazman, *Survey Of The Heritage Of Holy Wells In County Kildare*, (Kildare, Ireland: Archaeology Plan: Heritage Solutions, 2021) p. 14 <<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/61b0b814414fb8020e89e9d1/t/61d6ca1c13bdec5d6588dd47/1641466424505/Holy+Wells.pdf>> [accessed 13th April 2024]. For Brigid's Cows see Mario Corrigan, *Kildare Footprints: Kildare Town Walking Tour & Hertiage Trail*, (Kildare, Ireland: Kildare Town Heritage Centre, 2012), p. 25. <https://read.amazon.co.uk/?asin=B00U6SJTFI&ref_=kwl_kr_iv_rec_1> [accessed 23rd May 2024]. For the bronze statue of Brigid created by Annette McCormack, see Kildare Town Heritage Centre and Silken Thomas, *Kildare Footprints*, p. 33.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Chapter Four: Brigid Pilgrims of the Past



Fig. 4 – Brigid's Slippers in line with the prayer stones and the well beyond, at Brigid's Garden Well, Tully; Brigid's Well at Calgath; and Brigid's Wayside Well, Tully.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Fig. 4: 1 and 2 - Wyldewood, *Photographs*, 2023. Fig.4: 3 - Wyldewood, *Photographs*, (2017).

Pilgrimage in Ireland

Pilgrimage as a religious, spiritual, or cultural phenomenon is not unique to Ireland or Catholicism, or even to Christianity.⁷⁸ Historically, destinations of pilgrimage are locations deemed 'worthy of reverence because it has been the scene of a manifestation of divine power or has an association with a holy person'.⁷⁹ Journeys to these places took different forms: longer individual pilgrimages; local communal pilgrimages enacted on holy days; and local daily or weekly individual pilgrim practices. In medieval Ireland the pilgrim landscape was often local, only occasionally would a journey extend 'beyond regional and national boundaries' to the other side of the country or to places like Rome or the Holy Land.⁸⁰ Ordinary people, those not of the nobility, clerical, or professional classes, were limited in their movement and were usually only found travelling in the case of war or pilgrimage.⁸¹ Pilgrimages were not restricted to churches, monasteries, reliquary sites or graves, but included walks to holy wells, trees and stones, although the shrine of a saint was considered a specially 'active source of spiritual energy', a place to seek help or blessing.⁸² Increased devotion to a particular saint and the development of their cult often led to churches or monasteries associated with them becoming places of pilgrimage, especially if the place had made acquisition of a relic, a fragment of bone or item personally connected to the saint such as a bell or crozier.⁸³ Translation of the remains of holy people may have occurred as early as the fifth century in Ireland, with the first reliquary structures made of wood, then stone gabled or tentlike structures, and flat stone box shrines by the eighth century.⁸⁴ Reliquaries and chapel shrines became more elaborate by the eleventh and twelfth centuries, with increased income garnered for the associated monastery or church, not just through pilgrim traffic but via diocesan status and royal patronage.⁸⁵ The cultivation of or 'rejuvenation' of a saint's cult and 'creation of new pilgrim sites' were often the means of maintaining political control.⁸⁶ From the thirteenth century onward 'elaborate ceremonies' as a pilgrimage form became a frequent part of the liturgical calendar, with some processions enacted weekly in parishes.⁸⁷ This type of ritual movement and the carrying of relics had many theatrical elements and props, including the visibly valuable and highly decorated cross lifted up prominently at the front of the pilgrim procession.⁸⁸

As sites and routes developed, stone markers (pl. *leachta*) acted as focal points in the landscape, places of commemoration, prayer, and ritual.⁸⁹ Sometimes they acted as an altar or were key to a processional routes leading to the destination or were placed as pilgrim stations next to a shrine or well.⁹⁰ The recital of the required prayer might be made at each *leacht* and often was accompanied by ritual circuits (*turas*) of a specific number around it.⁹¹ Some rocky outcrops and many bullaun stones,

⁷⁸ J. G. Davies, *Pilgrimage Yesterday And Today: Why? Where? How?*, (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd, 1988), p. 1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

⁸⁰ Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 15.

⁸¹ Yolande O'Brien and Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland IAI, 2021.

⁸² Davies, *Pilgrimage Yesterday And Today*, p. 5. For types of pilgrimage places, see Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 16.

⁸³ Louise Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, pp. 16 and 32.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-22.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

⁸⁸ Lesser crosses, candles, censers, statues, banners, holy water, flowers, incense, vestments, music and song all enhanced the spectacle and increased the sensory immersion, see Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 209.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

boulders with natural or man-made hollows, featured in early medieval pilgrimage and tales of saints became attached to them. By the eighteenth and nineteenth century bullaun stones had become 'important devotional points'.⁹² The local well, at one time a necessary everyday destination, if dedicated to a saint afforded accessible, regular pilgrim practice, and such wells became 'part of the process of pilgrimage before the coming of the Anglo-Normans'.⁹³ Often connected to wells, but not always, were trees of significance. One type of pilgrim practice associated with trees is the hanging of the clootie rag.⁹⁴ The idea being that as the cloth strip rotted away so would the ailment or problem that prayer had attached to it.⁹⁵ The pilgrim stations of one site or route could include a combination of stones, medieval crosses, cairns, graves, wells, or trees. The route and the number of the *turas* (pilgrimage) was unique to each site, but commonly 'doing the rounds' meant walking sunwise around the pilgrim landscape and individual stations, whilst sets of prayers were recited, such as the 'Creed, Hail Mary and Our Father', three, five, seven or nine times.⁹⁶ Various actions recorded as part of individual and group pilgrim rituals included kneeling; bowing; prostration; claspings of the hands; stretching out of the arms; making the sign of the cross; recitation of prayers; kissing the ground, the station, or rosary beads; self-blessing with water; drinking of water; collecting twigs or bark; leaving votive offerings; dancing and singing.⁹⁷ The local pilgrimage and 'doing the rounds' as a regular form of worship endured throughout the Middle Ages until the modern era in Ireland and, for some, continues today.

Pilgrimage to Faughart and Kildare

Kildare is the focus in the earliest portrayal of Irish pilgrimage.⁹⁸ Cogitosus describes crowds of participants and observers gathering for the Feast Day of Brigid.⁹⁹ According to *Vita I* people may have started travelling to Kildare prior to Brigid's death, bringing 'bequests and donations' to the monastery in the hopes of her healing ailments or helping the poor.¹⁰⁰ Pilgrims wishing to 'curry favour with the saint' brought 'gifts and offerings' with them.¹⁰¹ Nugent observes that pilgrimages made around Brigid's feast day at the end of January and early February were likely to be affected by

⁹² Ibid., p. 38.

⁹³ Giacometti and Boazman, *Survey Of The Heritage Of Holy Wells In County Kildare*, p. 14.

⁹⁴ In Ireland, as elsewhere in the world, lies a pilgrim tradition of tying 'strips of cloth to trees that grow beside the well'. At times the cloth strip may come from the clothing belonging to a sick person. The intent necessitates a biodegradable fabric. Gerry A. Quinn, 'Healing Soils And Wells Of County Fermanagh', *Holy Wells Of Ireland: Sacred Realms And Popular Domains*, ed. by Celeste Ray and Finbar McCormick (Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press, 2023), pp. 51-59 (pp. 56-57).

⁹⁵ Quinn, 'Healing Soils And Wells Of County Fermanagh', pp. 56-57.

⁹⁶ Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 242.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 240-245. For kissing the ground and making the sign of the cross, see Davies, *Pilgrimage Yesterday And Today*, p. 233.

⁹⁸ Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 177.

⁹⁹ Cogitosus, 'Life Of Saint Brigid The Virgin', 37, p. 88.

¹⁰⁰ Seán Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae: Background And Historical Value', *The Journal Of The Royal Society Of Antiquaries Of Ireland*, 119 (1989), 5-13 (p.8) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25508969>> [accessed 20th April 2023]. For examples of donations and gifts brought to Brigid in *Vita I*: 32, 45, 46, 48, 68, 84 and 85, see Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae', 32-85, pp. 21-39.

¹⁰¹ Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 247. For 'great gifts' brought to Kildare by pilgrims, see Cogitosus, 'Life Of Saint Brigid The Virgin', 37, p. 88.

harsh or changeable weather which included rain, snow, frosts and strong winds, and pilgrims may have arrived relatively warm from the 'exertion of their journey' but would soon be very cold.¹⁰² It is possible that in addition to 'areas with fires', there may have been a provision of 'hot drinks and bread' by the nuns and monks to the pilgrims. The pilgrimage ritual itself would have been slow, with the pilgrims passing and touching the 'miraculous millstone' of Brigid at the inner enclosure entrance to gain healing.¹⁰³ Then their processional route would have taken them into the 'reliquary church'.¹⁰⁴ Although the pilgrims would have been divided 'there may have been a central space above the chancel rail that permitted the altar and reliquaries to be seen' and to ease the 'distribution of the Eucharist'.¹⁰⁵ For the pilgrims the sight of the richly decorated tombs and church; the sounds of the chanting, hymns and prayers; and the smell of the incense must have been a significant sensory and spiritual experience, and one that many would have undertaken annually.¹⁰⁶ Some pilgrims may have also chosen to engage in lengthier vigils inside the 'reliquary church at Kildare', it seems that praying overnight might have been a practice.¹⁰⁷ The market right at the entrance to the monastic site at Kildare suggests that the purchase of souvenirs, such as rosary beads or candles, would have been possible, satisfying the 'consumer tendencies of Irish pilgrims', either for personal use in prayer or contemplation, or to take home for loved ones (Appendix F: Fig. 2).¹⁰⁸ Although there is no evidence for pilgrim badges being associated with Kildare, they did become a popular purchase at pilgrimage destinations in the eleventh and twelfth century.¹⁰⁹

Pilgrimage at the central site in Kildare Town surely continued for many centuries given that repairs and additions were made up until the fourteenth century.¹¹⁰ It seems likely the two holy wells became part of the pilgrim landscape before the twelfth century, and it is not known whether the separate practices developed there continued after the cathedral fell into disrepair or whether they ceased during the Reformation.¹¹¹ Worship at Kildare and local pilgrim practice must have increased again after the impact of the Reformation to warrant the rebuilding of the Cathedral in the late nineteenth century.¹¹² The mound next to the stream near the 'garden well', on which the statue of Brigid now stands is traditionally the place where 'pilgrims have always prayed' and the whole 'site remains a place of pilgrimage' (Appendix E: Fig. 5).¹¹³

The development of pilgrimage at Faughart began after that of Kildare, and certainly never reached the same popularity by any stretch of the imagination during the Middle Ages. By the twelfth century Brigid's association with Faughart has been established and Bernard of Clairvaux's account of Malachy and three other bishops visiting the 'birthplace of Brigit the virgin' puts some pilgrim practice there by the twelfth century.¹¹⁴ The date for the secondary relic, the stone at the centre of Brigid's Bed, could

¹⁰² Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 181.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 181-182.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 184-185.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

¹¹⁰ Crowley, *Archaeological Impact Assessment Report: Kildare Market Square*, p. 7. For the monastic house in decay, see Howley Hayes Architects, *Kildare Town Walls*, p.8

¹¹¹ Giacometti and Boazman, *Survey Of The Heritage Of Holy Wells In County Kildare*, p. 14.

¹¹² Crowley, *Archaeological Impact Assessment Report: Kildare Market Square*, p. 7.

¹¹³ Kildare Town Heritage Centre and Silken Thomas, *Kildare Footprints*, p. 33.

¹¹⁴ 'There came, on one occasion, three bishops into the village of Faughart, which they say was the birthplace of Brigit the virgin; and Malachy was a fourth.' St. Bernard of Clairvaux, 'Life Of St. Malachy Of Armagh - VI',

possibly indicate a tradition there by the late eighth century, which may have been 'encouraged by the Canons Regular who were 'in control' of Faughart'.¹¹⁵ The date of the well dedication is not available, although it probably has been in practical use for more than a millenium (Fig. 3). Evidence points to that 'true stone of Brigid' still being the focus of pilgrimage ritual in the seventeenth century, with 'penitents kneeling on the pumice stone until their knees bled', and circumnavigation of the mound, again on the knees, is also recorded for the same time period, although the graveyard had been overgrown and unkept prior to this time.¹¹⁶ Following the papal authorisation of 1854 for a 'special licence' allowing the 'feast of St Brigid for eight days starting on 1 February' the saint began to emerge as a 'symbol' for the Irish Church.¹¹⁷ This led to the re-dedications of churches to Brigid and the building of new ones. However, Kildare was not to be the main focus of this resurgence. Faughart was. A National Pilgrimage was launched there in July 1934 after the building of the new shrine and additional stations at Lower Faughart.¹¹⁸ Just one year later, Curtayne writes about the 'curiously spontaneous revival of the cult of Saint Brigid', and states that Faughart 'acquired a new importance' because writers, artists and poets became inspired by Brigid and because a relic was returned from Portugal.¹¹⁹ The ritual observed during this time was still remembered in the 1960s and saw pilgrims move barefoot around the renovated site, beginning at the place 'where the stream enters the upper area' and finishing at the Head Stone in the lower part of the site (Appendix E: Fig. 1 and 2).¹²⁰ At certain times of the year the pilgrimage then extended on from Faughart to the Ladywell in Dundalk.¹²¹ It is noteworthy to mention, Faughart has always been an important pilgrimage site for the Traveller community, with many travelling long distances to carry out devotional practices, collect

Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <https://ccel.org/ccel/bernard/st_malachy/st_malachy.v.vii.html> [accessed 20th April 2024].

¹¹⁵ Boazman, 'The Material Culture Of Self-Promotion', p. 338.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Catherine Maignant, 'Making Sense Of Contemporary Commemorations Of St Brigid In Ireland: Art And Spiritual Renewal', *Enjeux Esthétiques Et Spirituels De La Commémoration: Aesthetic And Spiritual Stakes Of Commemoration*, ed. by M. Watthee-Delmotte and M. O'Connor, M. (Belgium: Editions Modulaires Europeennes, 2016) pp. 69–86 (p. 73).

¹¹⁸ Maignant, 'Making Sense Of Contemporary Commemorations Of St Brigid In Ireland', p. 75.

¹¹⁹ Alice Curtayne, 'The Rediscovery Of Saint Brigid', *The Irish Monthly*, 63. 745 (1935), 412-420 (p. 412) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20513775>> [accessed 15th March 2024].

¹²⁰ The complete pilgrim ritual at Faughart Shrine, according to seventy-year-old Owen Quinn and his wife in 1968, is as follows: Begin where the stream enters the upper area. Kneel on the left bank and recite one Pater, Ave and Creed, then cross the stream to the stone, and repeat the recitation. Make the Sign of the Cross over the water in the fountain, and drink it or apply it to any external part affected by a malady in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Say the Pater, Ave and Creed again while kneeling, or standing, on the stone in the middle of the stream. Complete ten circuits of the cross accompanied by the Rosary. Utter 'Saint Brigid, pray for us' after each decade of the Rosary during this walk along the stream. Say the Rosary at the grotto and then the Litany of the Blessed Virgin whilst following the stream across the road to the lower area. Recite the Pater, Ave and Creed again on the left bank of the stream just before the bend and again on the other bank at the Hoof Stone. Kneeling on the Knee Stone say three Paters, Aves and Glorias in honour of the Blessed Trinity. At the Waist Stone, again on the knees, say either the Pater, Ave and Creed, or one decade of the Rosary. Circle the Eye Stone ten times with recital of the whole Rosary or one decade. Finish by returning to the Head Stone for another Pater, Ave and Creed. Diarmuid Mac Iomhair, 'Townland Survey Of County Louth (Continued)', *Journal Of The County Louth Archaeological Society*, 16.4 (1968), 254-263 (pp. 255- 256) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27729164>> [accessed 24th April 2024].

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 256.

the waters, and to ask for healing and blessing at the shrine.¹²² Conversely, the practice of pilgrimage on behalf of another also continues at Faughart.¹²³

High roads like the *slighe*, and the lesser roads, the *bothar*, were frequently used by medieval pilgrims to get to monastic sites, which were purposely built near them.¹²⁴ With the Slighe Miudluachra running from Tara to Faughart and the Slighe Dala running from Tara in a south-westerly direction towards Ossary, Co. Kilkenny, passing through the town of Kildare, the route between Faughart and Kildare was a direct one on very good roads. (Appendix F: Fig. 5).¹²⁵ Given that most pilgrimages in Ireland prior to the twentieth century were not of great distance and longer journeys were only taken by those who could afford the time and expense, local lore about pilgrim practice at Brigid wells situated in a thirty-kilometre-wide stretch of land running between Faughart and Kildare could indicate longstanding local traditions undertaken. Drumbride, Cappoge, Dunleer, Grangegeeth, Dollardstown, Martry, Neillstown, Ardsallagh, Iskaroon, Killyon, Calgath, Enfield, and Ballinowland were all said to have had, and some still have, such wells (Appendix F: Fig. 6).¹²⁶ Father Moore's Well, Rathbride (Brigid's Stone), between Milltown and Kildare, also had a previous dedication to Brigid, before its 'retribution' in the 1800s.¹²⁷ Local lore also tells of a 'St Bridget's Walk' passing through

¹²² Attracta Brownlee, 'Irish Travellers And Holy Wells', *Holy Wells Of Ireland: Sacred Realms And Popular Domains*, ed. by Celeste Ray and Finbar McCormick (Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press, 2023), pp. 254-263 (pp. 254-256). In February 2017, after dark at the shrine in Faughart, the author observed two young traveller women singing their Aves in front of a candlelit grotto. In later conversation they explained they had come a very long way to request healing for a loved one, Wyldewood, *Personal Informal Observation*, 2017.

¹²³ 'At St Brigid's well in Faughart, County Louth, volunteers armed with pages of notes regularly 'do the pilgrimage' for people who have written their parish with prayer requests. These requests may come from across the country or from Irish abroad. Some people who have moved from their natal areas and are no longer able to return may have lost contact with, or outlived, their local friends and having a link to a proxy pilgrim and being prayed for at the site is a great comfort', see Celeste Ray, 'Beholding The Speckled Salmon: Folk Liturgies And Narratives Of Ireland's Holy Wells', *Landscapes Beyond Land: Routes, Aesthetics, Narratives*, ed. by Arnar Árnason, Nicolas Ellison, Jo Vergunst and Andrew Whitehouse (New York, USA and Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books, 2012), pp. 139-159 (p. 149).

¹²⁴ Yolande O'Brien and Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland IAI, 2021.

¹²⁵ P. W. Joyce, 'A Smaller Social History Of Ireland'. For the path of the Slighe Dala running Tara – Batterjohn – Ossary – Windgap, see Patrick W. Joyce, 'On Changes And Corruptions In Irish Topographical Names', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy (1836-1869)*, 9 (1864 - 1866) 225-252 (p. 227) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20488907>> [accessed 10th May 2024].

¹²⁶ For Drumbride, Dollardstown, Killyon, Calgath/Kilcock, and Enfield, see Celeste Ray, 'Query: Brigid', *Ireland's Holy Wells County-By-County*, (2024), <<https://ihwcbc.omeka.net/search?query=Brigid>> [accessed 10th March 2024]. For Cappoge, see National Folklore Collection, 'The Schools' Collection: St Brigid's Well – Cappog', 0669.005, *National Folklore Collection, UCD*, 2024. For Dunleer, see Michael Coyle, 'St. Brigid's Well, Dunleer', *Journal Of The County Louth Archaeological Society*, 13.2 (1954), 175-178 (p. 175) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27728860>> [accessed 10th March 2024]. For Grangegeeth, see National Folklore Collection, 'The Schools' Collection: Local Place Names – Fields – Wells', 0714.303-310, *National Folklore Collection, UCD*, 2024. For Martry and Iskaroon, see John M. Thunder, 'The Holy Wells Of Meath' *The Journal Of The Royal Historical And Archaeological Association Of Ireland*, 7.68/69 (1886), 655-658 (p. 655) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25506381>> [accessed 10th March 2024]. For Neillstown, see National Folklore Collection, 'The Schools' Collection: St Brigid's Well', 0700.109, *National Folklore Collection, UCD*, 2024. For Ardsallagh, see Navan & District Historical Society, 'Ardsallagh: Ordnance Survey Field Name Book 1835', *Navan & District Historical Society*, <<http://www.navanhistory.ie/index.php?page=ardsallagh>> [accessed 10th March 2024]. For Ballinowland, see National Folklore Collection, 'The Schools' Collection: Our Holy Wells - St Brigid's Well', 0800.176, *National Folklore Collection, UCD*, 2024.

¹²⁷ Suzanne Pegley, 'Father Moore's Well, County Kildare', *Holy Wells Of Ireland: Sacred Realms And Popular Domains*, ed. by Celeste Ray and Finbar McCormick (Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press, 2023), pp. 164-167 (p. 164). For Rathbride referring to Brigid's Stone (Rath Bhríde), which is also referred to as the Wart Stone or Healing Stone, as the remaining one of four stones or crosses at the corners of her lands or the curragh, see

three fields in Allen, Co. Kildare (Appendix F: Fig. 6).¹²⁸ Part of the route looks to be a Mass path due to the double hedging, the stone steps over the wall and its location near the church, although it is purported to be a 'preserved ancient path that St Brigid herself walked'.¹²⁹

Pilgrim practice in Kildare has been consistently local till the present day from the time of Brigid's death in the sixth century and possibly since the establishment of her monastery in the late fifth century. Regional and national focus peaked during the Early Middle Ages, with wider interest resurging again in the Modern Era. At Faughart the commencement of pilgrim practice probably began prior to the twelfth century and has been intermittent and localised until the early twentieth century. Both places currently contain wells and stones within their pilgrim landscape, and although the stones at the garden well in Kildare are modern, the rituals associated with both places certainly echo those of the past. Local lore would also indicate modern individual or community pilgrim practice at Brigid wells in the counties of Louth, Meath and Kildare between the key sites of Faughart and Kildare. Because 'old pilgrim paths are often preserved in local memory, especially when associated with monastic settlements', the path near Allen associated with Brigid, just eleven kilometres from Kildare Cathedral, is worth including in the representation of pilgrimage history, Faughart to Kildare.¹³⁰

Mario Corrigan, 'Some Local Folk Traditions Relating To St. Brigid', *Kildare Local History: Website Of The County Kildare Federation Of Local History Groups*, (2024) <<https://kildarelocalhistory.ie/articles/some-local-folk-traditions-relating-to-st-brigid/>> [accessed 1st June 2024].

¹²⁸ The author was first shown the near hidden entrance to the path, opposite Allen Cemetery (next to the Church of the Holy Trinity), in the area of Kilmeague and Allen, in 2017 by a local gentleman, who stated his grandmother had called it St Brigid's Walk, and that he walked it when he was a boy too, more than thirty years ago. The path appeared to be between two hedgerows but was very overgrown and unused. In 2023 the author found the exit point of the path and observed it to have been partially cleared. Wyldewood, *Personal Informal Observation*, 2017 and 2023. In 2024 the path was fully cleared by locals and the Allen Area Historical & Heritage Group led a walk through the entirety of the known route on 4th February 2024 as one of the Brigid 1500 events. For photographs and footage of the walk, see Allen Area Historical & Heritage Group, 'St Brigid Walk 2024' [Facebook], <<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=Allenareahistoricalandheritagegroup&set=a.396636966076227>> 4th February 2024 [accessed 5th February 2024]. For the description of the walk from the 1930's, see National Folklore Collection, 'The Schools' Collection: (No Title)', 0773.420, *National Folklore Collection, UCD*, 2024. See also National Folklore Collection, 'The Schools' Collection: Local Place Names', 0775.326, *National Folklore Collection, UCD*, 2024.

¹²⁹ Allen Area Historical & Heritage Group, 'Walk The Ancient Path Of St Brigid' [Facebook], <<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=380950414311549&set=a.189930606746865>> 7th January 2024 [accessed 28th January 2024]. For double hedging, see 'an awful lot of Mass paths around here, which the ancient double hedges and people used to use these to walk, you know, to Mass in secret' (Appendix F). For memories of a Brigidine Convent near Kilmeague, see National Folklore Collection, 'The Schools' Collection: Memo of Work to be Done in Folklore', 0692. 291, *National Folklore Collection, UCD*, 2024.

¹³⁰ Yolande O'Brien and Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland IAI, 2021.

Salvation and Devotion

The primary motivation for undertaking the medieval pilgrimage was faith.¹³¹ The walking prayer functioned as a physical demonstration of faith, a form of worship, and often was an expression of devotion to and celebration of a saint.¹³² For the pilgrim the proximity to a relic or the saint's energy in some way was to hope for a miracle, healing for the body perhaps, and to gain a blessing for the soul.¹³³ Saints acted as intercessory powers mediating god's guidance and forgiveness.¹³⁴ Many used pilgrimage as a bargaining chip, making a vow to embark on a journey, if help was given in some immediate crisis, such as famine, storm or plague.¹³⁵ By the eleventh and twelfth century the motivation for pilgrimage had become increasingly penitentiary with more and more shrines granted the right to offer 'plenary indulgence' or the 'remission from all suffering in purgatory'.¹³⁶ Whilst confession granted absolution from guilt, it did not grant freedom from the consequences of sin beyond death.¹³⁷ The hardship endured during pilgrimage acted as an outward expression of humility and the suffering paid the debt of 'moral and spiritual' offences.¹³⁸ The intention was a purgatory on earth, the pilgrim seeking to purify the heart and mind, and save the soul. Pilgrimages could be taken by on behalf of others, 'alive or dead', by friends, family or strangers, and the sale of indulgences at shrines, saw many walk in the stead of others. Ecclesiastical courts, such as Armagh, were known to have 'imposed pilgrimage as punishment for a wide variety of crimes' and, depending on the nature of the crime, pilgrims walked in 'sackcloth and ashes' or in 'iron fetters'.¹³⁹ Although barefoot pilgrims were common, Maignant suggests martyrdom and self-imposed exile might have been an additional motive for Irish pilgrims who embarked on longer journeys to find a place to settle, 'a place of resurrection', and some may have deliberately chosen similar hardships as those enforced for criminals.¹⁴⁰ Even in the late twentieth century the idea of pilgrimage for penance, walking on bare feet or bare knees, was embedded in 'Irish Christianity'.¹⁴¹

Another function of pilgrimage, for both the longer journeys and local efforts on feast days and patten days, was one of community. There was certainly a social element to the early medieval pilgrimages to Kildare, not just the prayers and devotions to the saint. The 'abundant feasting' described in Cogitosus' account and the presence of a marketplace indicates 'food and communal eating' played a part there, as it did for pilgrims to other early medieval sites.¹⁴² This social aspect would have included exchanging news and ideas, and, in the case of annual longer pilgrimages,

¹³¹ Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 69.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 32-33 and 70-75.

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 70.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 82.

¹³⁶ For the physical exertion of walking, rather than using other forms of travel, increasing the 'penitential merit', and walking barefoot even more so, see Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 106.

¹³⁷ John Adair, *The Pilgrim's Way: Shrines And Saints In Britain And Ireland*, (London, UK: Thames & Hudson, 1978), p. 12.

¹³⁸ Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 79.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 80. For sackcloth, ashes and iron fetters, see Adair, *The Pilgrim's Way*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁴⁰ Catherine Maignant, 'Alternative Pilgrimages: Postmodern Celtic Christianity And The Spatialisation Of Time', *Nordic Irish Studies*, 6 (2007), 17-28 (p. 17) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/30001561>> [accessed 20th March 2024].

¹⁴¹ Father John O'Riordain spoke in 1998 about the definition of Irish spirituality and 'the importance of traditional pilgrimages to such places as Knock, Lough Derg or Croagh Patrick', and included walking barefoot or on bare knees as part of those traditions. Maignant, 'Alternative Pilgrimages', p. 18.

¹⁴² Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 277.

meeting old friends perhaps. In the modern period the 'patterns' or patron days also had a societal function and were occasions of joy, and at times too good a 'day out'.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ For clarification on 'patterns', see Celeste Ray, 'An Introduction To Holy Wells Of Ireland', *Holy Wells Of Ireland: Sacred Realms And Popular Domains*, ed. by Celeste Ray and Finbar McCormick (Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press, 2023), pp. 1-26 (p. 1-2). Although not documented for Faughart or Kildare, drunkenness and boisterousness were reported at some wells, see Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 278. For 'festive, social, and carnivalesque' aspects of pattern days in the 18th and 19th centuries which included alcohol, music and dancing, see Shane Lehane, 'Tents, Ale Poles, And Pattern Pies: An Examination Of The Temporary Shelters And Food Of The Pattern Day 1700-1950', *Holy Wells Of Ireland: Sacred Realms And Popular Domains*, ed. by Celeste Ray and Finbar McCormick (Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press, 2023), pp. 191-203 (p. 191).

Chapter Five: Brigid's Way in the Present

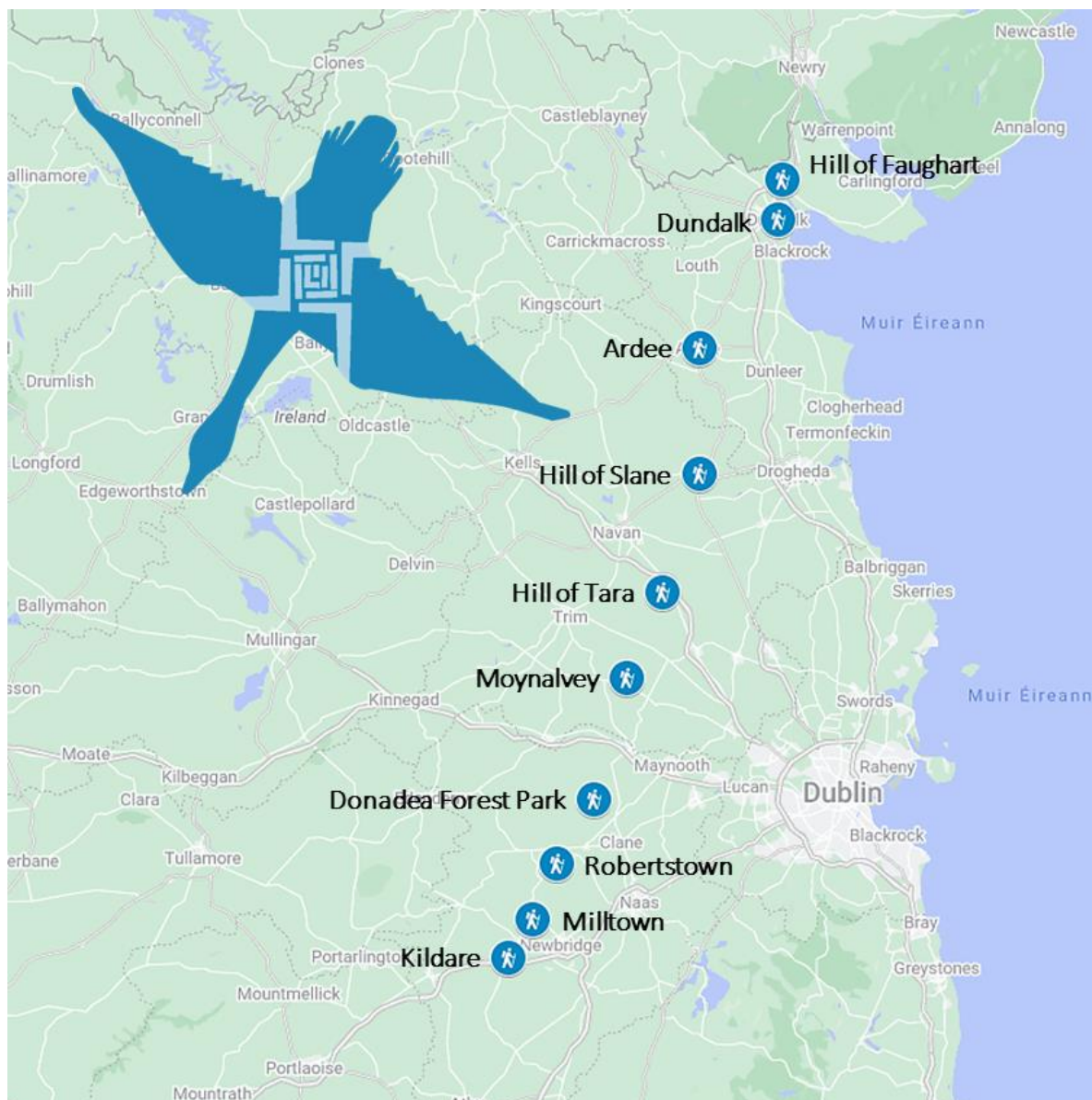


Fig. 5 – The day-by-day destinations of Brigid's Way starting at Faughart, Co. Louth, and finishing at Kildare, Co. Kildare. The swan, representing the constellation Cygnus, with the Brigid's Cross comprises the Brigid's Way logo.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Google Maps, 'Brigid's Way - Faughart To Kildare 1', *Google My Maps* (2024) <<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1Gxzu0MqKR4laHAfGUuuncaMMkNRjWeQ&usp=sharing>> [created and accessed 7th May 2024]. For Brigid's Way logo, see Brigid's Way, *Brigid's Way*, 2022.

The Nine Day Route

In 2012 Founder 1 gave a talk at an event hosted by Dr Mary Condren in Dublin (Appendix C). He spoke about a series of aligned features he found whilst investigating the skies at the time of Patrick's lighting the Paschal Fire on the Hill of Slane in 432AD.¹⁴⁵ The alignment includes Hill of Faughart, Mount Oriel, Hill of Slane, a significant mound at Thurstianstown, Hill of Tara, and the Curragh of Kildare, and he discovered 'the alignment appears to point towards the rising place of that great cross shaped constellation that we call Cygnus' which then traveled in the direction of the alignment in a Faughart to Kildare direction (Appendix A and Appendix F: Fig. 7).¹⁴⁶ Given the association of the Hill of Faughart and the Curragh of Kildare with Brigid, this information caught the imagination of Founder 2 and Founder 3 who decided walking that line, the 'coincidental alignment of sites' between the two, would be the basis for a pilgrimage for the pair of them (Appendices A, B and C).¹⁴⁷ Founder 3 felt they 'would be walking on a very ancient pilgrim path... a trajectory that was linking the two places... dedicated to Brigid, Faughart and Kildare' (Appendix C). The idea grew as they devised the route bit by bit, and when they eventually walked its entirety the following year, they took with them a group of pilgrims (Appendices B and C). The symbol they chose for a logo, a pilgrim badge of sorts, is a swan for the Cygnus constellation, 'which was mirrored on the earth with the monuments', and a Brigid's Cross to represent Brigid (Fig. 5).¹⁴⁸

The route outlined on the Brigid's Way website is broken up into nine sections, a day's walking for each (Fig. 5). The first and last days are by far the shortest in distance, allowing time for the exploration of the sites at Faughart and Kildare. Beginning with Brigid's Well, Brigid's Bed and Brigid's Pillar up on the Hill of Faughart, the route then goes down the hill to the shrine, the grotto, and the stream, taking in the modern stations and the older prayer stones (Fig. 7: 1).¹⁴⁹ The road then passes St Brigid's church in Kilcurry which holds a Brigid relic.¹⁵⁰ After this, it heads on towards Landowner's land, near Dundalk. In 1973 the historian Harold O'Sullivan informed Landowner about various 'monuments' on her land, and relayed that the pond, stream and springs of L*****y were 'blessed by Brigid and have healing qualities' (Appendix G).¹⁵¹ He recalled that local tradition holds a

¹⁴⁵ Anthony Murphy and Richard Moore, *Island Of The Setting Sun: In Search Of Ireland's Ancient Astronomers*, 2nd edn. (Dublin, Ireland: The Liffey Press, 2020), pp. 209-214.

¹⁴⁶ 'We discovered an alignment of monuments and you have to be careful about alignments because if you draw a line across the landscape of Ireland, and Britain is the same, you'll often find that you cross, you know, there's so many monuments that you're bound to hit something, but we found that some of these monuments are very, very important places. So, Tara and Slane, Mount, Oriel, and another mound at a place called Thurstianstown near Beauparc ... I was investigating an extension of that alignment. And one day using Google Earth realised that the beginning of that alignment, or what appeared to be its beginning was the sacred well of Bridget at Faughart in North Louth near Dundalk. And the southern end of it was the Curragh Plain, which is the plain, of course, where Bridget had asked the local king of Leinster, if she could have some ground upon which to graze her cattle' (Appendix C).

¹⁴⁷ 'I remember after the talk, buzzing, fizzing with excitement, and I got to talk to Founder 3. And I said, 'oh, I'm going to walk that', and she said 'I was thinking exactly the same thing'... She said, 'I'll walk it with you'. And that was really the start of it. We had no idea what we were getting into' (Appendix D)

¹⁴⁸ Brigid's Way, *Brigid's Way*, 2022. See also Murphy and Moore, *Island Of The Setting Sun*, pp. 211-214.

¹⁴⁹ Brigid's Way, 'Route: Day 1 Faughart to Dundalk', *Brigid's Way*, 2022.

¹⁵⁰ Kissane, *Saint Brigid Of Kildare*, p. 16.

¹⁵¹ The mythological hero Cú Chulainn (Ulster Cycle) and the historical William III (Battle of the Boyne) are also reputed to have connections to the land and the pool (Appendix F). See also Daragh Smyth, *Earthing The Myths: The Myths, Legends And Early History Of Ireland*, (Newbridge, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 2021), p. 126.

Brigid path running down near her stream.¹⁵² When Founder 2 and Founder 3 were creating the pilgrimage, they managed to find a route all the way from Kildare to the edge of this land, and then beyond it all the way to the Hill of Faughart (Appendix B). So, this piece of information indicated to them that the route should go across Landowner's land, which she also welcomed (Appendix G).¹⁵³ Additionally, the Slighe Miudluachra once traversed Landowner's land and the connected road follows the path of it, locally being known as 'back of the walls', according to Guide, in reference to Cú Chulainn's Castle (Appendix G).¹⁵⁴ From Landowner's land the road into Dundalk is fairly simple and pilgrims can see there a mural of Brigid (Fig. 6. 1). It is possible that this route from Faughart to Dundalk may also have been the original route for pilgrims progressing onto the Ladywell in Dundalk from the Shrine or Well at Faughart prior to the modern age, especially if in the past the waters of L*****y were also traditionally associated with Brigid.

The second day from Dundalk to Ardee affords a stop at Knockbridge (Chnoic Bhride – Hill of Brigid). Saint Mary's church there contains a stunning stained-glass window depicting Brigid created by Harry Clarke (Appendix E: Fig. 6).¹⁵⁵ Day Three to Slane takes two more Brigid windows, at Ballapousta Church and Church of St. Brigid, Grangegeeth (Fig. 6: 2).¹⁵⁶ The location of the well at Grangegeeth is not known, although Founder 2 has also been told by local farmers 'there's a Brigid's Well around here somewhere', but that they think it has been 'covered up' (Appendix B).¹⁵⁷ The well like structure and slab cover outside Grangegeeth church may mark the spot (Appendix E: Fig. 7). A Famine Stone memorial lies at the crossroads before Grangegeeth. The day concludes with a steep climb up the Hill

¹⁵² For an 'ancient track that she walked along on her way south' being west of Castletown or Dun Decla, Cú Chulainn's Castle fitting with O' Sullivan's claim that it crossed Landowner's land, see Smyth, *Earthing The Myths*, pp. 122-123.

¹⁵³ For 'Founder 3 was dumbfounded, and she said 'Founder 2 and I have walked from Kildare. Right up to practically the edge of our land and we think, we got stuck. We didn't know where to go then. And we knew then of course, the road leading up to Faughart, but we were stuck. We hadn't the clue where to go'. So, I said, 'but sure it was through here that she went'. So, they were amazed. So, that filled in the piece of the jigsaw that they had missing' (Appendix F). For a newspaper report confirming the circumstances of the meeting of Founder 3, Landowner and Daragh Smyth see Olivia Ryan, 'Cultural Event Takes Place At Historic Site: Women's Rural Network Event At Lisnawilly', *Irish Independent*, (2012) <<https://www.independent.ie/regionals/louth/dundalk-news/cultural-event-takes-place-at-historic-site/28966420.html>> [accessed 10th April 2024].

¹⁵⁴ For the location of Fort of Dún Dealgan, Cú Chulainn's castle, near Mount Avenue, see Google Maps, 'Cú Chulainn's Castle', *Google Maps* (2024) <https://www.google.com/maps/place/C%C3%BA+Chulainn's+Castle/@54.0138381,-6.4302206,15z/data=!4m6!3m5!1s0x4860c94dcc9d39bd:0xeac75a43d80a216c!8m2!3d54.0138381!4d-6.4302206!16s%2Fg%2F11c563msg_?entry=ttu> [accessed 14th May 2024].

¹⁵⁵ Brigid's Way, 'Route: Day 2 Dundalk To Ardee', *Brigid's Way*, 2022. Just before Knockbridge, pilgrims pass the field in which the Cloch an Fhir Mhoir (Stone of the Big Man) stands. This tall stone is associated with the legend of Cú Chulainn. The mortally wounded Cú Chulainn ties himself to a standing stone so that he may die standing up. John Carey (trans.), 'The Death Of Cú Chulainn As Related In The Book Of Leinster', *The Celtic Heroic Age*, ed. by John T. Koch (Massachusetts, US: Celtic Studies Publications, 1995), pp. 124-133 (pp. 129-130).

¹⁵⁶ The name Ardee comes from Áth Fhirdia, the Ford of Ferdia in remembrance of the four-day battle in which he lost his life to his friend Cú Chulainn. See Tom Condit, 'Heritage Guide No. 73: Where Ferdia Fell: Ardee, Co. Louth', *Archaeology Ireland*, (2016) 1-6 (pp. 1-2) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43816270>> [accessed 14th May 2024]. The pilgrimage route passes Ferdia monument situated by the River Dee on Day Three, Wyldewood, *Personal Informal Observation*, 2023.

¹⁵⁷ National Folklore Collection, 'The Schools' Collection: Local Place Names – Fields – Wells', 0714.303-310, *National Folklore Collection*, UCD, 2024.

of Slane to the site of the monastery ruins and the mound.¹⁵⁸ Day Four crosses the Boyne River, passes the 'Thurstianstown Motte', goes over the Brideswell Bridge, next to which is the Brigid's well, Dollardstown, and heads on towards the Hill of Tara.¹⁵⁹ As pilgrims arrive at Tara, the old Slighe Midluachra is visible as the 'road that's facing the Mulligan [Maguires] shop' (see Appendix G). Near the entrance to the monument complex at Tara is another holy well (Appendix F: Fig. 6).¹⁶⁰

Day Five leaves the Hill of Tara, passes the holy well once more and heads on to Dunsany.¹⁶¹ In the Church of the Assumption there is a stained-glass window of Brigid and opposite the entrance to Dunsany Castle is a late medieval pilgrim's cross.¹⁶² The route then heads on to Moynalvey. The next day the route takes in the beautifully tended Brigid well atop a mound at Calgath (Fig. 4: 2).¹⁶³ Then heading off through Bridestown and Kilcock, the Day Six route ends at Donadea Forest Park. Founder 2 has been told by those local to Donadea Forest that 'an old path which was known as the pilgrim's path went through Donadea Forest', although the history, purpose, or destination of it has not been ascertained as yet (see Appendix D).¹⁶⁴ Day Seven leaves Donadea Forest Park and the route meanders round the Ballynafagh Lake and through the Coolree Bog and finishes at Robertstown next to the Grand Canal.¹⁶⁵ The path alongside the Grand Canal and then the Milltown Feeder Canal makes for a tranquil Day Eight all the way to Milltown (Fig. 1: 4 and Appendix F: Fig. 8).¹⁶⁶ Using the canal path, the route lies on the other side of the Hill of Allen to 'St Brigid's Walk', which incidentally is directly on the Cygnus alignment between Faughart and Kildare (Appendix F: Fig. 6 and 8). The final day on the facilitated Brigid's Way pilgrimage starts at Pollardstown Fen, although the actual route is an hour longer from Milltown to Pollardstown Fen via Father Moore's Well (Appendix E: Fig. 8). After Pollardstown the route then heads across the Curragh, the final point on the Cygnus alignment, allowing for a visit to the Rath Bhríde (Wart Stone) before going down the R415 into Kildare Town (Appendix F: Fig. 4).¹⁶⁷ As pilgrims make their way into the town centre, they walk the line of the medieval outer ecclesiastical enclosure, round the corner into Market Square and to the entrance of

¹⁵⁸ For St Erc, follower of St Patrick and founder of the original monastery on the Hill of Slane, being a contemporary and travel companion of Brigid, see Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae', 69:1-71:3, pp. 34-35.

¹⁵⁹ Brigid's Way, 'Route: Day 4 Slane To Tara', *Brigid's Way*, 2022. For the Brigid's Well, see Ray, 'Query: Brigid', 2024.

¹⁶⁰ Brigid's Way, 'Route: Day 4 Slane To Tara', *Brigid's Way*, 2022.

¹⁶¹ Brigid's Way, 'Route: Day 5 Tara to Moynalvey', *Brigid's Way*, 2022.

¹⁶² Ibid. There is an earlier cross, 'Dunsany I', in the churchyard, although that may not be its original position, but 'Dunsany II' is in its original position wayside, see Heather A. King, 'Late Medieval Crosses In County Meath c. 1470-1635', *Proceedings Of The Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature*, 84C (1984), 79-115 (pp. 81 and 95) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25506113>> [accessed 31st May 2024]. The crosses may be connected to pilgrimages made to a renowned St John's Well near Dunsany, see Thunder, 'The Holy Wells Of Meath', p. 657.

¹⁶³ Ray, 'Query: Brigid', 2024.

¹⁶⁴ There is also a 'Dodie Tree' next to a water source in Donadea Forest Park. This is an evolved form of the 'Rag Tree'. Modern usage is the hanging of dummies, dodies, and pacifiers on the tree in the attempt to wean or 'cure' children of their soothers. It could not be ascertained whether the 'pilgrim path' was connected to prior use of the water source and rag tree. Carol Barron, 'Holy Wells And 'The Cure' In Twentieth Century Ireland', *Holy Wells Of Ireland: Sacred Realms And Popular Domains*, ed. by Celeste Ray and Finbar McCormick (Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press, 2023), pp. 153-163 (pp. 159-160).

¹⁶⁵ Brigid's Way, 'Route: Day 7 Donadea Forest Park To Robertstown', *Brigid's Way*, 2022.

¹⁶⁶ The Grand Canal and the Milltown Feeder were built in the last quarter of the 18th century, so this part of Brigid's Way is making the most of a modern pathway. Henry Phillips, 'Early History Of The Grand Canal', *Dublin Historical Record*, 1.4 (1939) 108-119 (p. 109-110) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/30084149>> [accessed 15th June 2024].

¹⁶⁷ Brigid's Stone is said to be the remaining one of four stones or crosses at the corners of Brigid's lands or the curragh. Corrigan, 'Some Local Folk Traditions Relating To St. Brigid', 2024.

the Cathedral, echoing the footsteps of thousands of medieval pilgrims (Appendix F. Fig. 2). Just before they make that turn towards the Cathedral they can now be greeted by a huge mural of Brigid of Kildare on the side of McHugh's Pharmacy (Fig. 6: 3 and Appendix F: Fig. 2).¹⁶⁸ This mural was painted by Mister Copy and officially unveiled on 1st February 2024.¹⁶⁹ A second mural closer to the Cathedral has been commissioned by the same artist. In Kildare, pilgrims have the opportunity to then visit the Cathedral, the Round Tower and the Fire House, before making their way past the Perpetual Flame sculpture to the wells and the Solas Bhríde sisters just outside the town centre at Tully (Appendix F: Fig. 3).

Ritual, Song and Prayer

Founder 2 and Founder 3 laid out elements they felt important to factor into the pilgrimage to give it depth and meaning. One of the 'most important ones' was times of 'walking in silence', either as a group or as an individual in order to deepen the contemplative nature of the pilgrimage and to remain present (Appendix C). Another was holding an intention for the pilgrimage, and they 'encourage' pilgrims to set 'three intentions: a personal one; one for family or community; and one for the world' (Appendix B). These intentions often included a resolution about personal growth, ongoing issues, or healing for themselves or for others.¹⁷⁰ Additionally, the founders felt prayers, songs, blessings, and poetry added further layers of meaning, turning it into a pilgrimage rather than just 'a stroll down the pier', which reiterates Adair's sentiment that to 'be more than tourists' the pilgrim has to 'embrace not only outward forms but inner meanings'.¹⁷¹ The Brigid's Way group's facilitation of the pilgrimage included several rituals at poignant sites, such as a water blessing at Hill of Faughart, a fire ceremony on the Hill of Slane; a druidic ritual at the Hill of Tara; and a fire blessing at the Fire House in the Cathedral grounds in Kildare (Appendix B).¹⁷² The groups are also shown how to interact with the prayer stones at Faughart and are told the meanings of the station stones in the Garden Well, Kildare.¹⁷³ Brigid's Way guides lead meditations at wells and other sites; hold group circles for check-ins, discussions, and simple dance; and provide storytelling and teach pilgrims how to make Brigid's Crosses (Fig. 7: 1 and 2).¹⁷⁴

The pilgrims echoed the importance of being present with the walk and having times where they chose 'to walk silently on the path' or sit in 'quiet stillness' by the wells. Pilgrim E and Pilgrim G said this silence afforded them a 'more introspective connection' to themselves, to the 'inner self', and to the land (Appendix H). All five of the pilgrims mentioned one of the rituals or all of rituals as being significant to their experience. One called them 'milestones' in their personal journey and another felt

¹⁶⁸ Conor Forrest, 'Captivating Mural Of Brigid Unveiled In Kildare Town', *Kildare Nationalist* (2024) <<https://kildare-nationalist.ie/2024/02/03/captivating-mural-of-brigid-unveiled-in-kildare-town/>> [accessed 15th April 2024].

¹⁶⁹ Forrest, 'Captivating Mural Of Brigid Unveiled In Kildare Town', 2024.

¹⁷⁰ Wyldewood, *Personal Informal Observation*, 2023.

¹⁷¹ Adair, *The Pilgrim's Way*, p.7.

¹⁷² Wyldewood, *Personal Informal Observation*, 2023.

¹⁷³ The stones represent the qualities of the saint: first stone for meditation or contemplation; second stone for hospitality; third stone for charity; fourth stone for peacemaking and justice; and the fifth for reverence for nature or connection to the land. The stones are actually stations two to six between Brigid's Slippers and Brigid's Well, with the well being the final station. Wyldewood, *Personal Informal Observation*, 2023.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

them to be ‘really important’ in helping them gain personal ‘revelations’ and in making the ‘whole experience feel more sacred’ (Appendix H). Pilgrim A’s experience of ‘forest bathing’ in Donadea Forest enhanced his desired connection with nature; Pilgrim B and Pilgrim E specifically mentioned the songs they ‘learned along the way’ as adding to the sense of the sacred en route and at sites; and Pilgrim D enjoyed making the Brigid’s Crosses. In addition to the guided contemplative, ritualised or processional activities around or up to features like Brigid’s Bed, the wells at Faughart, Kilcock and Kildare, and the stations stone at Faughart and Kildare, the author has observed individual pilgrims interacting with wells, stones, and trees in a self-led manner at sites along Brigid’s Way (Fig. 7: 1).¹⁷⁵ It appeared that some say their own prayers; touch or kneel on or near stones in a ritualistic manner; sit next to certain trees in contemplation; write in journals; bless themselves with or collect well water; or make offerings.¹⁷⁶ Pilgrims also collect reminders of place and of the pilgrimage in the form of small stones, leaves or feathers, and buy relevant candles, cards, books, and jewellery.¹⁷⁷ Some pilgrims wear items bought, created or found, such as Brigid Crosses, as symbols of their pilgrimage on clothing or rucksacks, and at times a Brigid’s Cross is held up at the head of the pilgrimage group, in addition to the flags used for safety front and back of the group.¹⁷⁸ Many of these ritualised activities undertaken by Brigid’s Way pilgrims are adaptable and are not limited to either a group or a solo endeavour.

Wellness and Connection

None of the founders interviewed experience Brigid only as a Christian saint, nor are all devout Christians themselves, having Christian, pagan, and agnostic views between them. All expressed the notion that a composite Brigid symbolises a bridge between a pre-Christian and a Christian past and again between the past and the present spiritual paths of many. All three talk of her as a saint, a goddess and an ‘archetypal energy’ with a love and passion for all she means to them. Founder 2 and Founder 3 felt awakened by her presence and felt inspired to walk a route dedicated to her, thereby creating the pilgrimage in its form today. Brigid functions for them as an inspiration; a connection to ancestral ways that existed both during and prior to the age of Christianity; a living myth; and as a personal spiritual guide (Appendices A, B and C). Despite Ireland becoming increasingly secular as the ‘Roman Catholic Church becomes less influential’ it appears Brigid still holds a special place within the heart of the nation.¹⁷⁹ Founder 3 feels Brigid is the only patron saint that ‘came out of Ireland’ and that her wider appeal is that ‘she came out of the stories... out of the mythology of Ireland’ (Appendix C). For the founders the pilgrimage is a means of walking with this composite Brigid and offering that experience to others. Only two of the pilgrims questioned felt any connection to Brigid as a saint before the pilgrimage, with two primarily focused on the goddess, one of which was actively not

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ In July 2023 opportunities to purchase items relevant to Brigid or to pilgrimage were made available at Maguires Shop on the Hill of Tara; at an evening in Robertstown hosted by Founder 1 and Founder 2; at a Brigid’s Cross making workshop at Dalgan Park Monastery; and at the Solas Bhríde Centre and Hermitages. These opportunities are made available every year as part of the facilitated walk. Wyldewood, *Personal Informal Observation*, 2023.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Kathleen M. Fisher, ‘Brigid And The Beasts: Ancient Wisdom For A Planet In Peril’, *Spiritus*, 19.1 (2019), 43-63 (pp.43-45) <DOI:10.1353/scs.2019.0003> [accessed April 10th 2024].

interested in a Christian Brigid at all (Appendix H). Therefore, the appeal of a pilgrimage between Faughart and Kildare does not rely specifically on Christian sensibilities, although Pilgrim G felt ‘a strong sense’ of needing to walk it because of the saint’s presence in their life. When asked about what pilgrimage means to them, Brigid’s Way pilgrims variously described it as a ‘spiritual, soul journey’ having a ‘particular focus’, being ‘as much about the internal journey as the external journey’. For Pilgrim D it was ‘time away from normal life... time alone to reflect and gain insight on their life and their place in the world’ (Appendix H). Founder 3 echoed that sentiment by saying ‘pilgrimage is a wonderful way for people to take time out of their lives and allow the deepest part of them to emerge’ and added that it enabled this deepest part to ‘connect with the divine within’ and the ‘earth’ (Appendix C).

Landowner, having observed and hosted many pilgrims over the years, considers the reason for undertaking Brigid’s Way to be ‘a very personal thing’ and that it is hugely varied depending on life experience and circumstance (Appendix G). Not all the pilgrims asked had Brigid as a focus prior or during the walk, yet four of them spoke of their deepening awareness of her or a ‘heart or energetic connection’ to her because of the walk, and for some the pilgrimage solidified their ‘spiritual path’ or encouraged them to ‘emulate Brigid’ (Appendix H).¹⁸⁰ In equal measure the pilgrims viewed the purpose of Brigid’s Way as connection to Ireland, to the land, to nature, to their ancestors, and to the faerie realm, and in what they perceived to be an expansion in their understanding of Celtic spirituality, Irish folklore, and of themselves (Appendix H). When asked about what they gained from the nine-day walk three of the pilgrims mentioned the sense of achievement they experienced on completion of the route and from accomplishing the fullness of the physical task and one said he gained a ‘sense of wellbeing’ from ‘moving through the landscape’. Maintaining or improving physical wellbeing, especially after a period of illness or unfitness, was important for Pilgrim B, Pilgrim E and the author.¹⁸¹ One Brigid’s Way pilgrim from a previous year described walking in her native landscape with intention and honouring the rituals and practices of her ancestors as ‘very healing on many levels’.¹⁸² For Pilgrim A, Pilgrim B and Pilgrim G the benefits included the ‘social and emotional’ nourishment the group and various ‘conversations’ provided and certainly positive connections are briefly made with local communities (Appendices B and H).¹⁸³ For Pilgrim E it was finding the ability to be the ‘best version’ of themselves, and for others it was the sense of tranquility, bliss, and peace they felt in certain places and well side (Appendix H). Founder 2 feels people, disillusioned with the church, are ‘yearning’ for ‘spiritual connection, whatever that might mean to them’ and that Brigid’s Way supports a fulfillment of that longing by being a ‘meditative’ process (Appendix B). Brigid’s Way functions then as a method for connecting to Brigid or the divine, and to Ireland and its people,

¹⁸⁰ Speaking of the pilgrims he has met over the years, Founder 1 observed that ‘they’re not really interested in a Christian pilgrimage per se, but they are interested in the character of Bridget and aspects or the characteristics the traits of Bridget’ (Appendix A).

¹⁸¹ A sense of achievement and elation upon completion of the physical aspect of the endeavour was a welcomed affirmation of personal capability and vitality. Wyldewood, *Personal Informal Observation*, 2023.

¹⁸² Fisher, ‘Brigid And The Beasts’, p.43.

¹⁸³ Founder 2 speaking about how local communities and individual feel about pilgrims passing through: ‘And then the next year, they saw us, and the next year. It’s quite phenomenal. People come out. ‘Oh, there you are again here’, ‘Do you want some water?’, ‘Anybody want to use the toilet here?’, ‘I baked some fairy cakes.’ People meet us at the wells. There’s a lovely well in Kilcock near Bride’s Stream and this local fellow kind of maintains the well, keeps litter away, he meets us nearly every year. As I said, the people in Donadea Forest. There’s an old man who lives near the turn off for Ballynafagh Bog, Lake, from Ballynafagh Lake towards Coolree Bog. And he sits in his chair and says ‘ah here yous are again’. So, there’s a lovely, how would you say, a continuity?’ (Appendix B).

ancestry, the land, nature, folklore, Celtic spirituality, and ritual practices perceived as of the past, and as a way to enhance physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing.

Chapter Six: Comparative Analysis



Fig. 6 – Mural in Dundalk, by the artist Fritz, depicting a composite Brigid; stained-glass window in Ballapousta of the saint; and new mural on the approach to the cathedral in Kildare Town by the artist Mister Copy.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Fig. 6: 1 and 2 - Wyldewood, *Photographs*, 2023. Fig. 6: 3 - Seoirse O'Mahony, 'Saint Brigid', *Barbara Picci: Artis & Art Blogger* (2024) <<https://barbarapicci.com/2024/02/14/streetart-michael-thompson-kildare-ireland/>> [accessed 7th June 2024].

Form

It has been established archaeologically and historically that pilgrim practice and worship occurred at Kildare and Faughart, but there is no record of medieval pilgrims moving intentionally between the two and no documentation of such a route being dedicated to Brigid. It is also not established that the saint herself moved from one to the other.¹⁸⁵ However, it is not unfeasible that pilgrimages were made to both places during the time these two sites were in use and associated with Brigid concurrently, either in the medieval or modern eras. For any pilgrims wishing to go from one to the other the simplest route would have been following two main Royal Roads via Tara, so its specific designation as a pilgrim path might not have been warranted or adopted. Brigid's Way differs in being the first known named route that links these two sites. It may have begun as following an astronomical alignment between the two, but it also naturally overlaps the old *slighe* at some points, which pilgrims did use for various journeys. There is evidence for continued pilgrim practice in more recent times at Faughart and Kildare, and at the Brigid wells of Grangegeeth, Dollardstown, Clagath, and Rathbride, situated in the landscape stretching between them. Brigid's Way does proceed via these wells, and on the facilitated walk guided interaction with features takes place at Faughart, Calgath and Kildare. There may not be documented evidence, or very little, to support the claim of paths through Landowner's land, Donadea Forest or at Allen, but, as O'Brien points out, local memory can sometimes serve as a record in these cases.¹⁸⁶ Perhaps these paths can speculatively be taken into account when considering the form of a pilgrimage which ties some of these threads together. Even routes like St Kevin's Way or the Tóchar Phádraig, which can be completed in one or two days, represent the final part of longer pilgrimage routes now mostly forgotten, so it would not be unusual for routes to Kildare and Faughart to have been longer than more recent pilgrim practice indicates.¹⁸⁷

Therefore, the structure of the Brigid's Way route bears similarities in part to those of medieval and earlier modern Brigid-related pilgrimages via the sites and pathways it takes in but differs to them in its inclusion of the many sites and pathways not known to be linked prior, and in its subsequent length and duration. Different too are the pilgrims themselves. Far from being local the majority arrive from overseas to take part (Appendices B and H).¹⁸⁸ When comparing the ritualised or devotional behaviour from medieval and modern pilgrim practice to those exhibited by pilgrims of Brigid's Way it is clear that walking and physical exertion; processing to or around a site; making circuits around features; interacting with stones, trees and wells; collecting well water; taking part in prayer, blessing, song and meditation; viewing iconography or imagery of the saint; visiting relics; gathering objects from or leaving objects at sites; retelling Brigid-related tales and folklore; making

¹⁸⁵ In addition to a lack of early hagiographical evidence for Faughart as the place of her birth, the topographical evidence for her ministry, prior to the founding of her church in Kildare, primarily indicates Laigin and Kildare, see Daniel McCarthy, 'Topographical Characteristics Of The Vita Prima And Vita Cogitosa Sanctae Brigitae', *Studia Celtica*, 35 (2001), 245-270, (pp. 251, 257 and 268) <<https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/uwp/stce/2001/00000035/00000001/art00007?crawler=true>> [accessed 12th April 2024].

¹⁸⁶ Yolande O'Brien and Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland IAI, 2021.

¹⁸⁷ Roads were sporadically recorded before the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and Irish pilgrim roads, like St Kevin's Way or the Tóchar Phádraig, 'survived only because stretches of their routes were recorded on maps and in local histories in the 19th century or survived in local folklore memory'. Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 129.

¹⁸⁸ 'It's important to say that from the get-go, from that first year 2013, people have come from Australia, Canada, America. All over Europe, the four corners of Ireland. I mean. Imagine you give up your holidays and you come from Australia, Canada and America', Founder 2 (Appendix B).

donations to fund the upkeep of sites; purchasing souvenirs; wearing pilgrim badges or symbols of pilgrimage; and eating and drinking at sites are common practices across the eras. Some of these actions appear like those of a tourist, even medieval pilgrimage could be perceived as a 'precursor of the modern package tour', but pilgrimage cannot be defined only by its outer expression or form.¹⁸⁹ It has an inner operation or function.

Function

The earliest pilgrimages to Kildare were made by those seeking healing, miracles, and salvation. Pilgrimages functioned as a form of devotion and prayer, the physical hardship given in the hopes of receiving blessing, with Brigid acting as an intercessory carrying the pilgrim prayers to Christ and to God. For those hosting pilgrims, whether en route or at the destination, they also provided an opportunity to act as Brigid would have, with generosity and kindness. As the Middle Ages progressed, pilgrimages, including those to Kildare and Faughart, became more about the 'expiation of sin and guilt', and the path of the Irish Church became synonymous with penance.¹⁹⁰ In this way too pilgrimages operated as means of control and the generation of status and wealth for the church. Despite this, local pilgrimages and pattern days always functioned as a point of community connection and cohesion. In the centuries after the Reformation, these pilgrimages were re-ignited and continued with elements of the previous functions. As time went on, Brigid was perhaps perceived as the more motherly and compassionate face of Catholicism so that devotion to her has remained after the modern secularisation of Ireland, and for many, especially in places like Faughart and Kildare, people still 'have a great devotion to Brigid' as their 'intermediary between us humans and divine' (Appendix C). Certainly, Brigid has 'emerged as an apt symbol of the system the Church wished to establish' in this modern age.¹⁹¹ The aim of the recent nationwide celebrations of Brigid was to 'create a meaningful cultural and societal legacy that appeals to a diverse contemporary audience.'¹⁹² As a saint she functions in a different way now in comparison to earlier centuries, and therefore pilgrimages in her name follow suit. Commemorations of Brigid are now thresholds to 'a dreamed future of peace, justice, unity and respect for the earth'.¹⁹³ A doorway to a heaven in life rather than a heaven after death perhaps. Modern pilgrimages, in Celtic lands particularly, appear 'central to the process of spiritual rejuvenation' and the recovering of a 'lost sense of mysticism'.¹⁹⁴ Brigid's Way thusly serves outside Catholicism and the Irish Church, and even outside Christianity, and because of the views held by its founding members it caters for a diverse and contemporary spirituality (Appendix A). Its pilgrims, whether from Ireland or from overseas, are seeking connection

¹⁸⁹ For Maignant's observation: 'As is always the case with Celtic pilgrimages, one may wonder how much of it can be equated with tourism and how much with genuine spiritual quests, but after all it is undeniable that all contemporary commemorations do have an economic or commercial dimension', see Maignant, 'Making Sense Of Contemporary Commemorations Of St Brigid In Ireland', p. 80. For 'package tour', see Peter Stanford, *Pilgrimage: Journeys Of Meaning*, (London, UK: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2021), p. 31.

¹⁹⁰ Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, p. 79.

¹⁹¹ Maignant, 'Making Sense Of Contemporary Commemorations Of St Brigid In Ireland', p. 73.

¹⁹² Kildare County Council, *Chief Executive's Management Report – December 2022*, (2022) p. 72

<<https://kildarecoco.ie/YourCouncil/YourElectedCouncil/FullCouncil/ArchivedMeetings/2022/ChiefExecutivesReport/Chief%20Executives%20Report%20December%202022.pdf>> [accessed 31st May 2024].

¹⁹³ Maignant, 'Making Sense Of Contemporary Commemorations Of St Brigid In Ireland', p. 70.

¹⁹⁴ Maignant, 'Alternative Pilgrimages', p. 18.

with a Brigid who means a variety of things to them. Different too is the purposeful mirroring, a ritual walk beginning to end, of a celestial alignment on earth. This was not a motivation in earlier pilgrimages.

Consequently, Brigid's Way operates very differently to earlier similarly dedicated pilgrimages because of the modern intentions of its pilgrims, which, although possess devotional aspects, are the fosterage of deeper connections to nature, the land, ancestry, and inner selves, and the generation of wellbeing and fulfilment. Healing and wellbeing are sought via intention and ceremony rather than through penance and repetitive prayer. Additionally, in an age where walking from place to place is unusual, for people to walk with purpose not only allows for their immersion in the surroundings and a slowness that might not have been rare for pilgrims of earlier centuries, it strengthens the body and the will.¹⁹⁵ Similarities can be drawn, however, when it is acknowledged that all these forms of pilgrimage enhance the individual experience of Brigid and the divine, beyond the church or notions of penance, despite the lack of early accounts about this aspect. Similar too is the function of social cohesion across the ages and the idea of Brigid being held as role model to emulate, as she was for Pilgrim E and Pilgrim G, and for those offering hospitality, like Landowner and Guide (Fig 7: 3 and Appendices G and H).¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Stanford, *Pilgrimage: Journeys Of Meaning*, pp. 14-15. Founder 3 talked of the slow pace being a privilege and being one of the 'really big gifts of pilgrimage', allowing one to see what one normally wouldn't and allowing one to be present: 'you have to slow right down in order to be present' She also stated that the pace and the pausing allowed 'the numinous aspect of the land to break in on our consciousness' and that this facilitates transformation (Appendix C).

¹⁹⁶ For nuns offering hospitality to early pilgrims in Kildare in emulation of Brigid, see Nugent, *Journeys Of Faith*, pp. 32-33.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion



Fig. 7 – Pilgrims at Brigid’s Well, Hill of Faughart; pilgrims in a creative writing circle next to the Milltown Feeder Canal; signs left out by a hostess to welcome pilgrims to their accommodation for the night; pilgrims on the road between Ardee to Slane; and pilgrims at the, Brigid’s Well, near Kildare Town.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Fig. 7: 1-5 – Wyldewood, *Photographs*, 2023.

First to assert is that ‘history and memory are two different things’, and that part of the function of Brigid’s Way is commemorative, ‘shaping or educating collective memory’ rather than solely informing about the past.¹⁹⁸ The description of ‘ancient path’ is limited to the celestial alignment occurring in Brigid’s day and the life path of Brigid as per tradition, birth to death, Faughart to Kildare. Brigid’s Way should be considered as an entirely new route form which echoes the footfall of Brigid pilgrims at the start and end points; where it overlaps the older roads; at the wells along the way; and on some of the pilgrim paths maintained in local lore. Wells and stones encountered en route were sites of pilgrim practice either in the Middle Ages or in the modern era. Ritualised behaviours observed in Brigid’s Way pilgrims bear resemblance to the actions undertaken on earlier Brigid-related pilgrimages, but it is the intention held in mind of Brigid’s Way pilgrims that deems their practices different from the devout and penitent Christians of the past. Brigid’s way is overwhelmingly about connection for pilgrims. Connection to Brigid; connection to Ireland; connection to ancestors; connection to heritage; connection to God, or even a goddess; connection to the land; connection to like minds; and connection to themselves. Gone is the walking to absolve sin and stave off the consequences of being human. Brigid’s Way has an almost diametrically opposite function to that of medieval and early modern journeys in that it is a celebration of the simple pleasure of being human, and is a means of deepening the connection to one’s own experiences of the divine, of nature and of life (Fig. 7: 1-5). Being barefoot on the grass is done for enjoyment not for sufferance. Brigid possibly never was a saint to suffer for, always a spiritual salve not just a means to salvation.

Questions have emerged during this exploration of Brigid’s Way. Could more information be found from local libraries and historical societies regarding pilgrim paths near Dundalk, Donadea Forest Park and Allen? What would a study about the age and spread of well dedications to Brigid reveal? Is the concept of a composite Brigid open to manipulation by the church or by tourism in Ireland? Will Brigid’s Way join the other twelve Pilgrim Paths of Ireland and gain official signage? It has been determined though, that Brigid’s Way presents as a timely evolution in Irish pilgrimage tradition, and like Brigid herself, appears to span the old and new; welcomes many faiths and no faiths; and stands for a future of kindness, inclusivity, and peace. It offers a joyous and thoughtful commemoration of the past, taking in many wells or streams related to Brigid, several churches dedicated to her, a relic, and many stunning depictions of Brigid via murals, stained-glass windows, and statuary, but importantly it embraces the needs and hopes of the modern pilgrim. For those who walk it, Brigid’s Way is a poignant and meaningful journey in the outer and inner landscapes.

¹⁹⁸ Maignant, ‘Making Sense Of Contemporary Commemorations Of St Brigid In Ireland’, p. 77.

Appendices

Appendix A – Interview With Founder 1

Before the interview Founder 1 was given the following questions for his consideration:

- Could you tell me briefly about your passion for the ancient and mythical in Ireland and how that led to your work as a writer, astronomer, journalist, and photographer?
- In 2012 Founder 1 and Founder 2 heard you speak about a Cygnus alignment between Faughart and Kildare and this inspired the pilgrimage, Brigid's Way. Can you tell me about this alignment, how you came to discover it, and what it means to you?
- Since your discovery, have you found any historical acknowledgement of the Cygnus alignment?
- Could you describe any connection to, and understanding you have, of Brigid?
- Have you come across any local knowledge, historical evidence, or folklore that leads you to believe that medieval or early modern pilgrim practice involved moving between Faughart and Kildare rather than just pockets of local practice focused on local wells or churches?
- I know you meet Brigid's Way pilgrims and give talks to them about the Cygnus alignment, but can you tell me what you think pilgrims gain from the overall experience of the pilgrimage and any general feedback you've been given?
- How does the route impact the communities it passes through do you think?
- From your more secular point of view, why do you think the popularity of Brigid is on the increase within Ireland today, and why does she draw visitors from overseas?
- The Brigid's Way volunteer group are actively seeking official signage for the route. What would this type of recognition and signage mean for Brigid's Way?

Interview Transcript from 4th March 2024

HW

Could you tell me briefly about your passion for the ancient and mythical in Ireland and how that led to your work as a writer, astronomer, journalist, and photographer?

F1

Uh, no, not briefly. No, I can't. I can't, but just to put them in the right order, astronomy came first. Astronomy and writing, you know? When I was a young child, just loved the stars and loved writing it. Probably the inspiration there probably came from my father who was, and still is at the age of 80, a journalist, and I used to borrow his typewriter to bash out writing. Which quite often were about astronomy, actually. Later on, I became interested in, see I live in Drogheda, which is very close to the Brú na Bóinne monuments, and so Newgrange is for just a tiny bit over 4 miles in that direction. So, when I was growing up the excavations of Newgrange and Knowth were revealing. So much about the spectacular nature of those monuments. I went on a school trip there in the 1980s, and then as a young reporter I visited out several times and spoke with George Hogan. And the whole thing really kicked it off in earnest in 1999, which is 25 years ago now, when I met Richard Moore, a local artist,

and he started asking me questions about astronomy and the stars and the moon and how they might have featured in ancient monuments. And from there, we rose uh, well, we made some discoveries in 1999. We discovered the winter solstice sunrise alignment of the Baltray standing stones. And the following year, we discovered the alignment of the great henge at Douth on summer songs to sunrise. And to be honest, that gave us a tremendous push I suppose, of discovering as, as you say, as non-academic or non-specialised enthusiasts and we explored the landscape, the mythology, the astronomical alignments, and then wrote a book together which is called 'Island of the Setting Sun', and that was published in 2006. And I set up Mythical Ireland in the year 2000, the website. So that's 24 years this year. And right now, I'm completing what I hope will be my 10th book to be published. I have two more books actually written. Believe it or not, that haven't been published yet. So yeah, that's as brief as I can give it to you.

HW

That was a fantastic overview. Thank you so much. In 2012, Founder 1 and Founder 2 heard you give a talk. I think it was at the Brigid of Faughart Festival there. And you talked about the Cygnus, this Cygnus alignment between Faughart and Kildare and that inspired this pilgrimage, Brigid's Way? So, can you tell me a little bit about this alignment, how you came to discover it and what it kind of means too?

F1

Yeah. So that talk was in Dublin actually. It wasn't part of the Brigid of Faughart Festival. It was an event that was run by Mary Condrón in Baggott St in Dublin. And, yeah, I was giving a talk about what we had discovered, and Founder 1 and Founder 2 took a major interest, and that was the inspiration behind the Brigid's Way pilgrimage, which was initiated the following year, I think 2013. Yeah, that whole discovery was prompted by a question that Richard Moore had asked years earlier.

So, Richard had been painting at ancient sites for many years and he had been at Tara and was thinking about the arrival of Christianity and Patrick, St Patrick lighting the Paschal Fire on the Hill of Slane, and his question was why? Why were the King's eyes being drawn away from Tara towards Slane at a time when there was a very major a feast or festival taking place at Tara. And he asked that question in a manner that would be, I suppose, intuitive, you know. There's an intuitive aspect. Sorry my dog's barking. I don't know if you can hear that. So, there's an intuitive aspect to the work too. He didn't know that there was a distinct answer to that, but it turns out that, we discovered an alignment of monuments, and you have to be careful about alignments because if you draw a line across the landscape of Ireland, and Britain is the same, you'll often find that you cross, you know, there's so many monuments that you're bound to hit something, but we found that some of these monuments are very, very important places. So, Tara and Slane, Mount, Oriel, and another mound at a place called Thurstianstown near Beauparc. And so, we spoke about this. I wrote about this in 'Island of the Setting Sun'. But after the book was published, it sold out very quickly, within a year, and I was investigating an extension of that alignment, and one day, using Google Earth, realised that the beginning of that alignment, or what appeared to be its beginning was the sacred well of Bridget at Faughart, in North Louth near Dundalk. And the southern end of it was the Curragh Plain, which is the plain, of course, where Bridget had asked the local king of Leinster if she could have some ground upon which to graze her cattle. And he said you can have as much as your cloak will cover. And she laid out her cloak and it stretched and covered the Curragh Plain. So, I thought maybe that this was part coincidence and part meaningful. I wrote about that in the revised edition of 'Island of the Setting Sun', which was published in 2008. And it was that that I was speaking about when Founder 2 and Founder 3 heard me talking about it. But it's a curious thing, because, I mean, if I was an

academic, I probably wouldn't have written it, you know. I probably would have said no. That's just one of these things. It's like drawing lines on a map. There's no sort of major, there's no major evidence for it. There's nothing. There's nothing written down about it, so it's probably just one of those things. But it became really, really curious, because I worked for a time as the editor of the Dundalk Democrat newspaper, which Dundalk is like the same size as Drogheda used to be, and rival towns in a small county. And my grandmother and my grandfather on my father's side were both from Dundalk. And while I was investigating the alignment, I found that very, very precisely it crossed through the property where my grandmother had lived for a time in her father's cobbler's, he was a shoe cobbler, premises at Bridge St in Dundalk. Bridge sounding like Bridget, another of the coincidences. But the fact that it's directly crossed through that property was extraordinary, especially because despite the passage of time, and despite the fact that it has been vacant for decades, that little house still stands to this day. Which is extraordinary because that whole street in Dundalk has changed completely. There's all sorts of new apartments and retail buildings that have been built there. So that I thought was just too much of a coincidence when especially when you consider my grandmother's name was Bridget, which is just another one of those things. Anyway, the day I discovered this, the fact that the Bridget, this apparent alignment of sites, crossed my grandmother, Bridget's old house, on that day I got a phone call from a friend, who's now deceased, Sean Gilmartin, and I was on the way home in the car, going like this, but I was probably on hands free, and I said, 'hey you, Sean' and he said 'how you doing, Anthony? I'm just ringing you because I'm giving a talk next week in Balbriggan Library and I thought it's a subject that might be of interest to you'. And I said 'all right, sounds interesting, what's the subject?'. He said 'St Bridget' and I sure nearly crashed the car. Because this is just typical of very major synchronicities and coincidences that happened during the years of research, especially those where the research was fruitful. It was only years later that Founder 3 and Landowner, the Bridgid's Way pilgrimage passes through Landowner's land outside Dundalk, that they told me that Harold O'Sullivan, who is a deceased historian in Dundalk, had written about the fact that at one time there had been a Pilgrim route connecting Faughart with Kildare and it's interesting that there should be something to connect them because there is a sort of rivalry. It's not vicious or anything. It's not, it's not a negative rivalry, but the rivalry between Faughart and Kildare. Of course, is the fact that Faughart is claimed as the birthplace of Bridget the Saint, and the Curragh and Kildare village are claimed as the place where she set up her monastery and where you know the eternal flame was guarded, and where she grazed her cattle and all that. But that I don't know the exact source of that. I, to my shame, have never pursued it. So I'd actually really love to know what O'Sullivan wrote about that and what the evidence for it was. Because if there was such a thing, and I have no reason to doubt that there was, on its way from Faughart to Kildare it would naturally pass through two of the greatest sites in Ireland in terms of, well, one very, very strongly associated with the arrival of Christianity, which is the Hill of Slane and one very strongly associated with the pre Christian kings of Ireland and the old deities of Ireland, which is the Hill of Tara. So, and that's yeah, I think that's it in a nutshell.

HW

Thank you. Can you tell me a little bit about the connection that you made with Cygnus itself?

F1

That is, I have to be honest, more tenuous.

HW

Okay.

F1

Because I've read over the years as much material about Bridget as I can and I can't find anything in the folk belief around Bridget that connects her distinctly with the swan, the bird that is connected with Bridget. But the alignment appears to point towards the rising place of that great cross shaped constellation that we call Cygnus. And the specific reference there is, and this harks back to Richard's question, so, when he asked why were the King's eyes, why were the King's eyes being drawn away from Tara towards Slane, well, of course the Pascal Fire was lit up on the Hill of Slane. That's principally why. But was there something else? Of course. We're suggesting that there's this alignment underlying the story. But further to that is the fact that the fire was lit, and we're given a very specific moment for it, the fire was lit at dusk on the eve of Easter, Easter vigil Saturday, Easter Saturday in the year 432AD, and so, having such a precise moment in time enables us to use astronomical software to rewind, as it were, and look at exactly what was happening in the sky. At that moment, and extraordinarily, what's happening in the sky at that moment is, at dusk, so sun's gone down and twilight is descending, the first stars are coming out, and hovering directly over Slane in this form, a sort of, at a 45° angle, is the cross of Cygnus. And the rest is a little bit interpretive. What does the cross represent? Well, obviously in this context, in the context of the Pascal Fire, we thought, well, the cross is representing the Cross of Christ and the announcement of the new faith, which was very dramatic. If you read the story about Patrick, lit the fire, and how it was in breach of the law and how the king went to Slane with his druids, and there was a battle of wits as it were, or battle of wills between the King's party and Patrick's party, which Patrick was victorious, and the rest, as they say, is history. And but the other aspect is the transformation of the cross as a symbol of paganism into a symbol of Christianity. Why do I mention that? Well, because the nearby monuments of Brú na Bóinne, which are the largest Neolithic passage tombs in Ireland, which are very strongly associated in mythology and folklore with the pre-Christian deities, the Tuatha Dé Danann, the principal shape of the main chambers of Newgrange and Knowth and Dowth is cruciform. So, a cross was obviously for some reason that we're not sure about, because we've no writing that tells us why, for some reason the cross was a very significant shape to the pre-Christian, well not just pre-Christian, I mean the building of Newgrange took place three and a half thousand years before Patrick arrived with his Christian message, but very strongly associated with Newgrange are these stories of Swans. Two very prominent ones. One is Aisling Oengus, the dream vision of Aengus Og, and Aengus is, becomes the principal deity of Newgrange. When he, when he tricks his father the Dagda, the sun God, out of ownership of Newgrange and he has to take the form of a swan in order to be with his dream lover, who is Caer, and she's a changeling. She changes into a swan, so she spends a year as a swan and then she turns back into a woman for a year and a year again as a swan, and so on and so forth. And so, he has to become a swan. And they, having fallen in love and him having accepted the challenge from Caer to turn himself into a swan, they fly together to a Newgrange and fly into the monument, presumably living happily ever after, because that's where the story ends. The other story is about the birth of Setanta, who becomes Cú Chulainn A very, very prominent mythological character, a warrior of ancient Ulster, who was also conceived magically, and born at New..., but his mother was taken there, or went, was brought to Newgrange by following a mysterious flock of swans from Armagh from Emain Macha. And so that I read Andrew Collins's work the 'Cygnus Mystery'. In 'Cygnus Mystery', Collins purports or reports that the swan is one of the forms of the English version of Bridget which is Bride, but I couldn't find that in Irish and I didn't want to try and contrive it, but the fact that at the moment the fire is lit, Cygnus is directly over Slane. I think is a significant aspect of the story. And then the fact that the swan as its prior form, you know, was somehow associated and all again sitting along this alignment. So, if for instance, you were to go back further to the Curragh in 432 AD and you looked at Cygnus at this moment in time at dusk on the 26th of March 432AD, which

is the day we're told, was Easter, you'll see exactly the same thing. You'll see the cross shaped constellation. And as you look at that, you're looking along this amazing sight line that traverses, what is it, I think it's sixty miles of Irish landscape, about a hundred kilometres or so. Passing through significant sites on its way, including of course, the two aforementioned most significant sites, Tara and Slane.

HW

So is the idea that then, that Cygnus would be rising and sort of moving through the sky along that alignment during the time of Brigid's lifetime, is that is that kind of generally the reason why they've arrived at creating Brigid's Way. With the idea of the swan, do you think?

F1

Like, so what, what I can say is that at the moment the fire is lit, Cygnus is in alignment with this sightline of monuments, if you if you want, or this alignment of monuments and I think that's why they've incorporated it in because, well, the cross of course is very strongly associated with Bridget, the Bridget's Cross. I have one on my shelf there and you know, so the cross of Bridget is generally hung like that. I mean, some people hang it like that, but a lot of the time you'll see it in the diagonal. And if you look at Cygnus, you'll find that it, like the crucifix, it has, of course the what we call the tail star, which is Deneb, the bright star and it has a star in the middle. I think that's Sadr, and then so it has a star for each of the arms of the cross, but it has an extra star out here to complete the long leg of the crucifix, as it were, you know. And I just thought about the beautiful, and I suppose synchronism of all that, the fact that the swan constellation represents the Bridget's Cross, in the diagonal rising over the Hill of Slane as the fire of Christianity is being lit. And if you study what has been written about Patrick and Bridget, they were contemporaneous. They both lived at the same time, and they knew each other. And there's another element to this, which is a tiny distraction, but it's, I think it's also important, is that there is a very ancient mound on the top of the Hill of Slane. So long before what we see today was there, which are Christian monuments and old church ruins and a graveyard and a Franciscan college, there used to be a round tower there as well, long before any of that was there, on the on the summit of that hill is an ancient mound, described by archaeologists now as a castle moat. The moat, the mound upon which an Anglo Norman Castle was built after the 12th century AD, but which is highly, highly likely to be a prehistoric burial mound associated with King Sláine, who's a prehistoric, a pre-Christian figure of myth, and if you trace Patrick's journey from the estuary of the Boyne to Slane, you can carry that journey on, and it directly goes all the way to the West to Croagh Patrick. You were to pick three sites in Ireland that are very strongly associated with Patrick. The three sort of, the ones which are the preeminent sites of Patrick. One is the Hill of Slane, where he lit the Pascal Fire. One is Croagh Patrick where he fasted for forty days and forty nights and was attacked by demon birds, by the way, and where from where the tradition grew up that he banished the snakes. And of course, the other one is Downpatrick in County Down in Northern Ireland, which is reputed to be the site of his grave, where he was buried. So, you've got this sight line. He arrives into the Boyne Estuary. He goes up across the Plain of Brega to Slane, lights the fire, and then eventually finds his way to the Croagh Patrick. And that is an equinox alignment passing through this mound at Slane. So, you've got one line going from East to West, crossing directly through this, very precisely through this. And you have another one crisscrossing it. Which is the alignment of Bridget, the two principal saints. I mean, the third, of course, major saint of Irish tradition is Colum Cille. And so that's I think again, is maybe part of the idea of a cross. That Slane marks a point where the two alignments intersect, one associated with the male patriarch of the church, Patrick and the other with the female, Bridget.

HW

Thank you. I think we've kind of covered a couple of the questions ahead. I'm just trying to, let me just catch up. Yes, maybe just, sort of briefly describe the connection that you, the understanding that you have of Brigid, because I know that when we spoke before you, you expressed that you have a more secular view. So just kind of, you know, maybe sort of express what you have an understanding Brigid and just why you think that, you know, in these changing times, why do you think she's becoming so more, much more important again, why her profile is rising and why do you think pilgrims come to walk this particular route?

F1

I think it's a very, very good question. So very briefly, I was raised in a Catholic household, although my father is, I think pretty much like myself. He's agnostic. My father was never much of a ..., never went to mass with us. My mother in particular, you know, was, I mean, she's still alive, she was quite devout, when we were younger, but as the years went on, and especially when the scandals in the church came, she sort of pulled back from it. But I so, I was brought up in a Christian tradition. But by the time I reached adulthood, I realised this is, this is just empty. I mean, I desperately tried to hang on to it, to be honest. I was desperate to believe in something and I prayed when I was young and I prayed as a teenager and I wanted to believe in God and Jesus, but it never rang true for me. And of course, by the time I started my own researches with Richard into, you know the old traditions of Ireland, the pre Christian traditions, I found that there was something else there entirely, and that was equally valid, if not more valid as a belief system. I eventually decided at some point, it wasn't a decision that I just woke up some day and said I'm agnostic, but I think it just dawned on me over the years that that's what I am. I'm not atheist. I don't believe there's nothing, but I don't believe in this overarching, capricious, angry, Old Testament God, who's very jealous, and thou shall have no gods before me. Bridget is a funny one. As a Tuatha Dé Danann and deity, she wasn't really on my radar because there's not much written about her. I became very interested, in particular in the deities associated with Brú na Bóinne, so The Dagda, Boann, Aengus, Elcmar, you know Englec[?], you know, all of the, all of the deities were in the myths associated with the Boyne Valley, so Bridget wasn't on the radar. And if you'd said to me, you know, thirty years ago, you're going to become very interested in Saint Bridget, I would have said no, I don't think so, you know. But so, the way I describe it is, and I think I said this in that talk, that Founder 2 and Founder 3 were at, is that Bridget kind of taps you on the shoulder, letting you know that she's there, and if you ignore her, the tap gets harder and harder, and eventually she slaps it across the head. And how she slapped me across the head, of course, was that amazing discovery that this alignment that we had discovered. I don't know if that's the right word. Re-discovered or contrived some people might say. I'm sure there's a lot of people out there have read about the Brigid's Way and gone, 'I'm not sure, I don't think', you know, whatever. And, of course, everybody's entitled to their opinion or their belief, and I have found though, in reading about her that I think there's an aspect of Bridget that falls outside the strict bounds of Christianity and religion and dogma, you know, and prescribed belief and Catholicism. There's an aspect of Bridget, and this is maybe why there's such controversy and debate and intrigue about the fact that she's both a Tuatha Dé Danann deity and a major Christian saint figure, so there's very, very, very little written about the pre-Christian Bridget, but there's a huge adoration for Bridget. And I've found, a couple of times a few times I participated in the pilgrimage, I found that the participants, by and large are not dyed in the wool Catholics. In fact, it would appear to me that quite a number of them have a more secular outlook, like myself, and they're not really interested in a Christian pilgrimage per se, but they are interested in the character of Bridget and aspects or the characteristics the traits of Bridget. Bridget, curiously, was born on the threshold of a house and I think even that is extraordinary. I think

that the threshold that Bridget is born on is a threshold between systems of belief. It's a threshold between worlds, between this mortal world and the next world, because she is, whether we like it or not, she is an advocate of God. She became, she was very powerful in terms of becoming for the Irish a figure of great worship. And I don't have a great disdain for the early church, I have great disdain for the scandals of the twentieth century Catholic Church in Ireland, but the early church, I don't have that much truck with, and I think that modern pagans contrived this idea that Patrick was some sort of a sadist, you know, as a just a bishop who committed genocide against the pagans. And that's not really the story. The story is that Christianity in Ireland adopted a lot of the pre-Christian traditions. So it's no surprise then that a goddess, or it shouldn't be a surprise that a goddess who was essentially Pagan, and I don't like using that word, cause it's a pejorative word used by the church to describe anything that's anti-Christian or not Christian or unchristian, like and yeah, there's no surprise that a figure who, a figure of devotion, a female figure should become a major figure of Christianity. Now she takes second place to Patrick and there's no doubt about that. And there's no doubt that that story has misogynistic aspects about it, but Bridget was very, very single minded, a feminist icon in a way. She basically founded a monastery for nuns and defied, of course, the King of Leinster. And. I think she wrote her own rules to an extent and no doubt, no wonder then that she should become a figure of worship. And if you take away the, or if you just put to one side, the trappings of Christianity associated with her story, Bridget has something of a universal appeal. There's absolutely no doubt about that. I mean, as somebody who has drifted a long way away from Christ, Christian belief, I still find that the attitudes I still find some of the core messages of Jesus to be very inspirational and to be the core tenets of decent humanity, right, but I don't have to, I don't have to go to mass to prove that. I don't have to go to mass to give that legitimacy in the very same way I can privately. I really have something of an admiration for Brigid, without kneeling down to pray to her, if that makes any sense, you know. And so, you may be aware that in, and I hope this doesn't pre-empt another question, but anyway if it does, it does I apologise for that, but you know in recent times, we've had a new public holiday declared in Ireland in honour of Bridget, on you know the Monday that's the closest to the 1st of February. And that's extraordinary, because we are actually now a secular nation. I will be fifty this month, if I last until the 23rd of March, I will be 50. In in my lifetime, I have seen incredible change. When I made my first communion as a seven- or eight-year-old child, and if you could go back in time and hop into a time machine and see the mass devotion to Catholicism and the sacraments, and if somebody was to say to me then, 'you know by the time you get to midlife, all of this will, not completely have disappeared, but it will have become almost irrelevant, and that's more prevalent in the east of the country than it is in the west, and in some more traditional pockets', I would have said 'no, geez, there's no chance that. How would that happen, you know?' And yet here we are. We've seen it. And in against that backdrop, we now have in Ireland a public holiday, a bank holiday in honour of St Bridget. To be honest, I would say it's not even St Bridget. It's just Bridget. We have a pilgrimage along Brigid's Way. We have a devotion to Bridget or an interest in Bridget that falls outside the bounds of any prescribed religion. Which I think is in itself, it's quite, it's interesting, it's curious, but it's remarkable as well. And yeah, I'm, as a person who doesn't pray or doesn't, the deities possess, I mean from a psychological standpoint, if you've ever read the work of Carl Jung and the likes of Joseph Campbell, you know you'll know that archetypes are very important and it's the archetype we often identify with. But what people tend to do, is they start to literally believe in the deity, that they did exist and that they still exist and that you have to do certain things and dress a certain way, and on certain days you have to perform rituals. And that's not me. And that never was. Me and my interest in Bridget, is that for me she is a figure of religion, who, curiously and fascinatingly is areligious almost, there's no, there is a sense that the Bridget, that there's a sense that we as the as the Irish people, there's a sense that we still, even though a lot of people are atheistic today, there is a sense that there's something in Bridget's story that still appeals to us, which can't

actually be said for Patrick, despite the popularity of the St Patrick's Day festivities and the fact that St Patrick's Day is now becoming not just an international celebration, but in fact, in Ireland, here in Drogheda, for instance, it's becoming a weeklong thing. It used to be a one-day parade and a day off work and let's all go to the pub. Now it's becoming a big, so that is not because of Irish people's devotion to the figure of St Patrick. Not at all. It's just an excuse to celebrate. Whereas Bridget is different. We haven't taken Bridget and put her to the side like we have with other Catholic Saints. As a secular nation, we haven't decided you're not relevant anymore. There's an aspect to Bridget that remains relevant to us, you know.

HW

Thank you. That was a really. That was a really interesting perspective. I appreciate that. Let's have a look, Ok. We'll just move to the last one. So, the Brigid's Way volunteer group are actively seeking official signage for the route. What do you think this type of recognition and signage would mean for Brigid's Way?

F1

Well, I think it will. I mean, the primary thing is that I think it will introduce it to a wider audience. To be honest, it is at the moment a fringe pilgrimage. That's not the right word. It's not fringe. It's an undiscovered, it's, the number of people who actually participate in it is very small. And maybe part of the reason for that is because when people see the word pilgrimage, they immediately think Catholicism. And I know this because, when I took part in the pilgrimage in the inaugural year in 2013 and I posted pictures on social media, I had people commenting. 'Oh, are you a Holy Joe? I suppose you're in with the Holy Joes now'. And all this and the other. And I think no, you I don't think you understand. And so, I think it's still relatively unknown. And I think signage is part of the, as part of the process of bringing it to a wider audience then, a wider level of participation. To be honest, I think what it has going against it is the fact that parts of the route are on narrow public roads which the pilgrims are sharing with traffic. And it's not altogether the safest, and it's not all together, I've never walked the Santiago to Compostela, I've never, I've never walked the Camino, so I don't really know what that's like. But, there are other routes in Ireland. There's the Tóchar Phádraig in the West, most of which, you know is a lot on sort of abandoned pathways across fields and bogs and hills. And so that is another aspect. The signage I think to be honest, that's like here we are about eleven years now, and I know that Founder 2 has told me on a number of occasions that she was chasing up with the authorities and that she'd been told, yes, it's going to happen. But the only thing I could say is, as a person who's agnostic and secular it's going to sound like a strange thing, if Bridget wants it to happen, it will happen, you know.

HW

Thank you. Yeah. Thanks. Just one last thing that I want to go back over. Do you know of any sort of local knowledge or historical evidence, because we've talked to you and I before about the Harold O'Sullivan paperwork, and as of yet you haven't tracked it down. I'm still trying to track it down. I've found other pieces of his writings. I've heard people say he wrote about it, but I can't track it down, but do you know of any other sort of historical evidence or folklore that leads you to believe that there was an earlier pilgrimage route or early modern pilgrim practise that involved moving between Faughart and Kildare. I found parts that you know, obviously specific wells, they have recent pattern days or pilgrim practice, but not the complete moving between the two points. And I'm just wondering if you've come across anything like that in your research.

F1

No, now the honest and straightforward answer is no, I haven't. I suppose part of that is that I haven't really looked, because after I wrote about the Bridget alignment in 2008 in 'Island of the Setting Sun' my focus went on to other things. I wrote a book about Newgrange. I've written a lot of books since then. I've made other discoveries since then, so it's not something that I devoted a lot of time and attention to. So no, this is the very honest answer. I have never, apart from what Founder 3 and Landowner have told me in relation to what O'Sullivan, O'Sullivan being a local historian, may have been writing for, for instance, the Louth Archaeological Journal or one of those. So somebody has to know where that is likely to be. You know, somebody is likely to be able to pinpoint the exact source. It's probably something that was written and published in a journal, or a local history guide in the 1970s or the 1980s, I would say. Because we had, we had a generation of historians in the 60s, who founded a History Society in Drogheda and who published a journal and you know, if you're, if you're like, a lot of those journals would be out of print and difficult to find on the second-hand market. And so, but I suspect somebody in Louth Archaeological Society. I know a lot of the old, the old guard has passed on, as it were, but I suspect if, I suspect if that was brought up as a, you know with somebody in the society, they'd say they'd be able to say, 'yeah, I think I know where that is likely to have been'. But outside of that, the absence I see, this is why. For me, Brigid's Way is it's more of a personal thing than as if I was, I told you at the beginning, if I was an academic scholar, I would never have written about Brigid's Way because I've no evidence. Personally, I don't possess any evidence to suggest that it is anything other than a coincidental alignment of sites. It was the other, the other aspect of it, the magical stuff, as it were, the coincidences and the personal connection with my grandmother Bridget. And, you know, even Founder 2 and Founder 3, we all had relations called Bridget who were associated with cobblers, shoe repairs, and here we were involved in setting up a pilgrimage route. Which is the sort of thing where you would find your shoes needing repair afterwards. You know, which I mean all of those bizarre things. To be honest, I would love to have the time to return to it and to find out more about that, because to be honest, if there's anything, if there's any, remember we could be talking about something that's 1500 years old. If there's any remnant of tradition about it, then that won't be just found in Faughart and Dundalk, that will be found in Kildare too, and perhaps in the places in between. And so as wide as I have cast my net, looking through old folklore archives and reading local histories and all the stuff that I've read over quarter of a century, I haven't found it. That's not suggesting it doesn't exist. And in fact, if O'Sullivan, who would have been a historian first and foremost, I'm not a historian, strictly speaking, some of the things I've written are quite imaginative and speculative, and as a historian first and foremost, he would have been writing from the standpoint of documentary evidence. So, if Founder 3 and Landowner are saying it's there, it's there, and even if it's only a fragment. I think it could be very, very important.

HW

Thank you. I'm going to stop the recording now.

Appendix B – Interview With Founder 2

Before the interview Founder 2 was given the following questions for her consideration:

- How long have you had an interest in and connection to Brigid, and could you briefly describe what she means to you?
- After hearing Founder 1's talk in 2012 about a Cygnus alignment between Faughart and Kildare, why were you personally inspired to walk a pilgrimage between these two points in the name of Brigid?
- Whilst Faughart and Kildare both have long historical traditions connected with St. Brigid, how did you and Founder 3 go about researching the route between the two places?
- I noticed that you call yourself a re-discoverer of Brigid's Way, what caused you to think that a pilgrimage route from Faughart to Kildare might have existed prior to the one you dreamed of in 2012?
- Not including Faughart and Kildare, can you speak about the specific parts of the current Brigid's Way route that you have reason to believe had previous pilgrim practice in the name of Brigid associated with it? If you can cite any sources or provide material evidence in addition to local knowledge or hearsay that would be helpful. You previously mentioned via email Landowner's field, Dundalk; Donadea Forest Pilgrim Path; and Clondalkin Pilgrim Path.
- The Brigid's Way volunteer group are actively seeking official signage for the route. What would this type of recognition and signage mean for Brigid's Way?
- What do you feel Brigid's Way offers pilgrims today? Why do you think people choose to walk it?
- How does the route impact the communities it passes through do you think?
- How does the facilitated summer pilgrimage differ from a self-guided walk that one might take via the instructions on your website?
- What type of pilgrim practices do you encourage people to undertake throughout the nine-day journey?
- Can I just clarify, you researched the route in 2012 and first walked it in 2013, is that right? Do you remember how many pilgrims walked the route with you in the summer of 2013? And how many pilgrims have walked the whole or part of the route since its inception in 2012, do you think approximately?

Interview Transcript – Founder 2 – 1st March 2024

HW

Thanks for meeting with me, Founder 2. So, we've already had our preamble chat. I'm just going to sort of dive right into the questions. OK. So how long have you had an interest in and connection to Brigid. And could you briefly describe what she means to you?

F2

Like many Irish children, I was introduced to Brigid in school. Usually early February, end of January, early February, we were all told the story of St Brigid and we were weaving crosses, or it was a Holy Day. We went to mass and that was normal. There wasn't any huge connection. There was St Patrick's Day, we'd move on to Saint Patrick, and so on. But it was when I was in my early thirties, I was introduced to shamanism, earth-based spirituality, and I remember vividly we were in a particular class which was all about archetypes, and the teacher invited us to bring an archetype to the class and to tell everybody about it. And it was quite lovely. Somebody did Homer Simpson as an archetype. And I remember one girl who was quite quiet and shy waltz into the room in a long dress and a cloak. And she stood up in front of us, and her archetype was Brigid. And I remember thinking, it wasn't saying to Brigid, it was Brigid. And when Catherine began to talk something deep inside me clicked. This was not Catherine, the shy girl in the class talking. This was Brigid talking directly to me. And something happened. There was an awakening within me. And then I began to realise, I need to go to Kildare or I need to go to her wells. I need to know more and what began to unfold was that my great grandmother and father, Julia and William Vaughn, lived in a cottage literally a stone's throw from Brigid's fire temple in Kildare. He was greatly taken and was present when the Brigidine sisters relit Brigid's perpetual flame in the town square. Mary McAleese, the president was there at the time. And something lit within me. And then I subsequently discovered that my grandmother, Kathleen Witty, who grew up in Kildare, went to Acura[?] Dance, met Captain Frank Witty who waltzed her madly in love, and he was from Clondalkin on the outskirts of Dublin, which also has a Brigid well and a Round Tower. So, in both sides of my family, on my mother's side, grandmother, grandfather was huge, and Brigid, ancient roots. And then I subsequently discovered that Cill Dara, Kildare, in Gaelic Irish is the chapel or the church of the oak. But my paternal grandparents are from Derry, which is also Deira and of course the oak tree is a huge symbol of Brigid and very much of the druids showing her pre-Celtic goddess roots. So, it's always been there in my background but I have to say the awakening came in my 30s, actually I was probably mid-30s now that I think about it, and from then on, I often say I don't know whether I walk with Brigid or Brigid walks with me, but she is a huge guide and influence on my life. She's an archetypal energy that resonates deeply with me. I often laugh and say when Brigid gets you, she gets you, and she has work for us to do and in no uncertain terms tells us what it is. So yeah, to this day she she's a force of nature. She is the epitome of this Irish feisty woman who stands up for what she believes in. She protects those under her care. She's the bringer of spring. She heralds hope. So much of Brigid resonates very, very deeply with me.

HW

Thank you. So after hearing Founder 1's talk in 2012. About a Cygnus alignment between Faughart and Kildare, why were you personally inspired to walk a pilgrimage between these two points in the name of Brigid? Why was it a catalyst at that moment?

F2

At that time, Brigid was a key spiritual guide, if you will, of mine, and I realised that my devotion to Brigid was all centred around Kildare so I felt it was time to go to Faughart to her birthplace. I'd come across Founder 1 before and I'd heard great things about him. And I have to confess, the first time I saw him, I saw this, this lovely kind of young dad kind of guy, in his chinos coming in and I expected some like aged professor to walk in, but once he opened his mouth and the passion and the depth of

research that comes out of him, it's mesmerising. But I hadn't heard him specifically talk about Brigid. So I went up to Faughart. I knew of Founder 3, because she's a Celtic scholar. She's 15 years older than me. So she's an elder, wonderful elder. And I remember sitting in the packed room. I was by myself, and Founder 1 came in and began to speak about the Cygnus alignment. And once again, something clicked deep within me. I would say in my heart of hearts, it was a calling, a vocation. I just knew that I had to walk this route, and the interesting thing was Founder 1 was talking about Cygnus alignment at the time of Bridget. I mean, he and the wonderful Richard Moore who made the Cygnus alignment discovery with him had no idea. They weren't familiar with the 'as above, so below' that that myself and Founder 3 had been. But I remember after the talk, buzzing, fizzing with excitement, and I got to talk to Founder 3. And I said, oh, I'm going to walk that, and she said I was thinking exactly the same thing. Now she was over the other side of the room, so [thought] independently. She said, 'I'll walk it with you'. And that was really the start of it. We had no idea what we were getting into. We had no idea the depth and the spread of her cloak, if you will, over the phenomenon that is Brigid's Way. But something I, looking back on it now, I feel as though I recognise the time was right for this rediscovery, and she was searching around for people who would, I think in my case, would have the drive and the vision and the rigour to make it happen, and in Founder 3 she was looking for the, the background, the history, the clout. Brigid. Founder 3 is very well known and her seminal book, 'Ever Ancient, Ever New'. Like when we went to see the Solas Bhride sisters they knew Founder 3, whereas I was an unknown psychotherapist from Dublin, so I think we were a very good match in that respect, and interestingly enough, as we began to walk the route our gait matched to each other. Which doesn't always happen. I thought that were in step.

HW

That, oh, such a good answer. Thank you. So Faughart and Kildare both have long historical traditions connected with Brigid, how did you and Founder 3 go about researching the route between the two places?

F2

It was. It was really curious when we look back on it. Founder 1 and Richard literally took out a map, put a point on the Faughart well and with a straight line, they had a ruler, an old-fashioned ruler you have school and they drew a straight line down the Curragh and it passed through all of these sacred sites. Now the key ones would be the Hill of Tara, the Hill of Slane, the Hill of Tara. But there was Realtoge, Beauparc Motte, um, all of these lesser known in straight line. I remember we walked, we consciously walked the routes out of sequence because we wanted the first time to walk from Faughart all the way down to the Curragh to be special because what happened was, as we began to walk all these synchronicities came about and people heard what we were doing and said, 'oh, I want to go with you', 'I want to walk with you'. And I remember the fact that it's nine days really spoke to me. Three, as you know, is a key number within the Celtic world. Think of the triple spiral, but three threes is exceptional in numerology. So, we consciously walked from, say for example day one from Faughart to Dundalk, and then we might have walked day four, and then we would walk day seven and so on. And some of the routes we walked two and three times until we found the right route. And it was very much led by the co-rediscovery of Brigid wells, Brigid churches, quiet roads that really resonated with us. That brought us to places in this beautiful, lush countryside that people aren't really familiar with. I mean, you don't necessarily hear, hear of walking trails along this route. It was

lesser known and the stories of people along the way, we were given breadcrumbs by Brigid to know that we were on the right track. So, that first year 2012, which was a very significant year, a lot of people had you know, there's a lot of prophecies. The Hopis. I think Columba, about 2012 and that it was ushering in a new era. So, we felt that this was the key part of it. And that was the year we did our reconnaissance as you would.

HW

Thank you. So not including Faughart and Kildare, because there's quite a lot of historical references to them, can you speak about the specific parts of the current Brigid's Way route that you have reason to believe had previous Pilgrim practice in the name of Brigid associated with them? And if you can cite any sources that will provide material that's going to be so helpful, even like local knowledge hearsay, that sort of thing, folklore. You previously mentioned in an e-mail Landowner's field, Donadea Forest Park pilgrim path there. And Clondalkin Pilgrim path.

F2

We were very conscious that this this was a calling, a vocation, and we were two, shall we say, spiritual women, but we recognised that for this to have, how would you say wider appeal, such as the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, that there was a historic element that, so that we were open to any knowledge we could hear about that. And the first one was a divine synchronicity when Landowner, the wonderful Landowner who lives on the L*****y domain in Dundalk, invited Founder 3 to speak for the Country Women's Association. And she said the other, she wanted Founder 3 to speak on Brigid, but she said she has a historian, Harold Smith, [*Harold O'Sullivan] talking about King Billy, and she had another person talking about Cú Chulainn. And she said yes and all with the connection with Brigid Stream on my land. Founder 3, now, who had lived in Dundalk for years, was 'what?' So basically, there is a stream on the L*****y domain. And the story goes, the Brigid element was, shall we say, channelled by a woman, I can't recall her name, but Landowner knows the name, and she saw a very young Bridget, en route from Faughart towards Kildare, a young, maybe fourteen- or fifteen-year-old girl. Very bright young energy there. Harold Smith [*Harold O'Sullivan], who the late Harold Smith [*Harold O'Sullivan] now, he was a historian, and he was able to make the link between Cú Chulainn and Ferdia, who had their famous battle in the Táin Bó Cúailnge, in Ardee in that area, the Dee River, and that they used to bathe their wounds, which would heal overnight in this magical stream. And then when William of Orange came, the famous battle of the Boyne, again his soldiers camped out nearby for the same reason. So that was number one. The second one was when we went, when we did our reconnaissance in Donadea Forest, amazing, you know, synchronistically enough it was an open day for what they call it, the 'Friends of the Forest', and these were a group of local Church of Ireland people who were guardians of the forest, if you will, very much into environment ecology, this wonderful local jewel on the edge of Kildare. And they were able to tell us that there was a section of the in the forest, an old path which was known as the pilgrim's path. And unfortunately, most of these people have died at this stage, like when we met them in 2012/2013, they were all I'd say in their 70s, some of them the 80s at that stage, but I don't think it would be too hard to find that out. And then we recognise that the Brigid's Way we were walking was Faughart to Kildare, nine days, but we also heard of a man who was walking from Down Patrick to Faughart, three-day walk. And Downpatrick is where Brigid is now buried. She was reburied during the Viking raids. But then the Historical Society in Kill [*Kill History Group] contacted me to say

that they have a lot of Brigid connections. There's a well, there's a church, and we recognise that from Kildare to Dublin there's another three-day walk. And in Clondalkin, particularly where my grandfather and my great grandmother was from, uh, there is what they call the Pilgrim Path and this is on it's on a hill. Unfortunately, like the Hill of Allen, it's a quarry, as often happens with these things, but the local Historical Society [*Kill History Group] recognised that seemingly Brian Boru camped here as well, but the Pilgrim Path, which is a little country lane, off that are Saint Brigid's Cottages, it leads on to Saint Bridget's Road and that leads on to Saint Bridget's Well. And it's near what's called Monastery Rd. So there, there was a big monastery there, Clondalkin with monks. Therefore, when Brigid would have walked towards Dublin, possibly on her way to Glastonbury, because she has huge connections there, so it really makes sense. So, we feel that Brigid's Way is unfolding before us. It's getting bigger. Her cloak is spreading and, but they would be the historical connections. And then of course, even two years ago, we discovered a new Brigid's Well, just outside Hayes Town. One of our leaders, Sarah Lachman, was walking by. She saw this unusual gate. She thought it was, and it's known as a kissing gate, but it looks like a well and she discovered this old well, that was very overgrown. And the locals said, 'oh, that's a Brigid's Well, we had heard of a well', that was the day four route. We'd also heard of a well on the day three route in between the two Brigid churches with magnificent stained-glass windows. [*Ballapousta and Grangegeeth] And we never found it. Old men used to come out, farmers, who would see us every year and they'd say, 'oh, yeah, there's a Brigid's Well around here somewhere'. And somebody said, 'ah, that's covered up'. We reckon that somewhere around the famine stone on that route from Ardee to Slane. And I've no doubt that there's more. There's more. I mean there's lots of Brigid's Schools, some St Brigid schools, some Brigid GEA clubs. But I think the main thing would be the plethora of sacred sites on that line, and then the historic connections and then of course your yourself, St Bridget's field near Robertstown again, that has been walked this year. So, the historical societies are a clue to what might be out there.

HW

Thank you. So, the Brigid's Way volunteer group are actively seeking official signage for the route. What would this type of recognition and signage mean for Brigid's Way?

F2

It would, it would be really huge in the terms of recognition, but most importantly, it's access because Founder 3 and I realised all those years ago that, we joke, we co-rediscovered what was an ancient path there, but we recognised that the Camino in Spain from either France or Portugal, whichever way you walk it, people can go themselves. It's all there, they can look it up online or there's organised groups that walk it. People either bring their luggage on their back or they get it bussed from place to place. So, we saw that, that's how Brigid's Way would evolve. They there is a national Pilgrim Path organisation [*Pilgrim Paths Ireland (PPI)] and we joined, and we love the fact that Brigid is the thirteenth pilgrim path to join, and of course thirteen lunar cycles in a year and interesting enough, Brigid is the thirteenth exit on the motorway, Kildare, at Kildare. However, the other twelve pilgrim routes are all male saints, and they are all signed. So, in other words the county councils have put up what are brown heritage signs and Brigid's Way is not signed. Therefore, up until now we've more or less had to lead the walk, and we usually do that in the summer, around July this year, it's June. However, we have spent years working on the website to the point that anybody can walk it by looking up the website on their phone. Now it would be a lot easier if there was an app, but over the

years we now have little videos on telling the stories we have. We add to it every year and we've had a number of people who have very successfully walked this on their own, but the signage would be really, really key and an app that people can download, or even a leaflet from the heritage centres, so that Brigid's Way becomes like the Camino, something that is accessible. That's really important. And there's an equality, anybody can do it who can read a map or listen to an app. And that it also frees up the good, good people that have given and devoted so much time and energy to this to get it to that point. However, we recognise there is a glorious gap, in that, naturally enough, particularly Kildare and Louth County Council, they give their money locally, to the people they know, 'ah the Solas Bhride sisters, we'll give them a few bob', 'ah the Brigid of Faughart, we'll give them a few bob'. And Brigid's Ways, it's a bigger vision, and we're talking to Ireland's Ancient East, but it's, we need a champion and we have decided recently that one of Brigid's gifts is she always found a way. So, whether you are devoted to her as pre-Celtic goddess or as a saint, her attributes are very similar. So therefore, we are coming at this from a different angle. We are approaching a number of very well-known matrons and patrons. And like yourself, we are looking to the academic research element so that it gets to the stage that actually county councils will be coming to us saying 'please can we have a part of this? Can we be involved?' So yeah, yeah, we have to trust and be there. There's no point in getting frustrated with this. There's wonderful new blood in the Brigid's Way firekeeper volunteers and it's so exciting to see how much everybody brings to this and that it's a collective. But I would say in a word, accessibility equality, the diversity of the people. We had lovely Ukrainian people walked with us last year. The Travelling community always meet us in Clondalkin and that's really important.

HW

Okay. So, what do you feel Brigid's Way offers pilgrims today and why do you think people choose to walk it?

F2

I think there's, there's a timing aspect to this in a way. For, for in the pre-Celtic and Celtic times Brigid was a deity that was very much revered, associated with springtime in the Celtic Isles. And then, of course, the Catholicism took over and Saint Brigid was revered. She was known as Muire na nGael, Mary of the Gales, Mother Mary of the Gales. But there was a time in Ireland where we in recent history we have become more of a secular nation. And I think with all of the controversies and the awful abuse coming to light with the church people walked away. And I suppose with modernity modern lives we don't need that anymore, but actually there's been a complete swing back where people are yearning for connection, spiritual connection, whatever that might mean to them. And again, for a long time, being an island nation, we were literally trapped on the island. You either saved up and bought very expensive flights from Aer Lingus, or you got the cattle ship to England. But in recent years, suddenly people are flying all over the place. Holidays, foreign holidays, continental holidays are the thing, and there was years of us all flocking to beaches and lying toasting ourselves. But again, with the environment, and with that there was a sort of 'is that it?' Again, there's a yearning for something different, deeper, the busy world we live in. Mindfulness meditation, yoga, Tai Chi. There's that, yeah, yearning for connection and a recognition that these pilgrim roots are tapping into the ancientness of our ancestors, literally walking the footsteps of our ancestors, but bringing a meditative uh, what, 'what is it all really about?' Connection with Nature, Mother Earth? Father Sky. And connection with each other. So, I think Brigid's Way. It's ours. It's our Saint. She's our goddess.

She's woman. They're, they're caring, nurturing. There's so much there. Everybody who's walked with me over the many, many years have been changed irrevocably. I don't think you can do Brigid's Way and not be changed it. It really is different, and we've had time and time again people who've walked uh say they climbed Kilpatrick, Saint Patrick, they've done Saint Declan's Way or Saint Kevin's Way and they've just loved the perhaps exotic mountainous scenery, the valleys, where's Brigid's Way is quite flat. There's no mountains. There's no deep valleys. But it's very, very special. There's a resonance in every step of the way that really touches people deeply. That's quite.

HW

Thank you. Such a good answer. How does the route impact the communities that it passes through, do you think?

F2

Oh, this is really special. We, the first time we walked it, when we met locals, they thought we were crack like, 'what are you doing?' 'Where you going?' 'Oh, Brigid. Yeah. Yeah.' 'Saint Brigid, but it's not February', because usually July. And then the next year, they saw us, and the next year. It's quite phenomenal. People come out. 'Oh, there you are again here', 'do you want some water?' 'Anybody want to use the toilet here?' 'I baked some fairy cakes.' People meet us at the wells. There's a lovely well in Kilcock near Bride's Stream and this local fellow kind of maintains the well, keeps litter away, he meets us nearly every year. As I said, the people in Donadea Forest. There's an old man who lives near the turn off for Ballynafagh Bog, Lake, from Ballynafagh Lake towards Coolree Bog. And he sits in his chair and says 'ah here yous are again'. So, there's a lovely, how would you say, a continuity? I remember one year this was quite funny. We were in Knockbridge and we were having our picnic lunch on the fair green and we could see in the corner of the green there was a bunch of young people, teenagers. And suddenly one of them came over to us. Fine. Big looking fella and had his hand behind his back. Founder 3 and I looked at each other and thought, what are they out here? She was brilliant. She got up and she said, 'How are you, what you doing?'. She stood up beside him and he, was kind of 'oh', and she said, 'I'm Founder 3, who are you?' And he says like 'I'm Sean', or whatever. And she got chatting to him and suddenly we looked behind and there was a dribble of water from his hands. He was dared by the others to come over and throw a water bomb at us, but Founder 3 completely disarmed him with her charm, complete channelling Brigid, and in the end, all these teenagers who were bored stiff, there was nothing for them to do in the summer, they walked with us to the next village. They were thrilled. They thought this was. So therefore, there is all age groups, all walks of life, whether it be, as I said, Historical Societies, local walking group. Currently there's one of our Firekeepers, Siobhan Matt and her father Paddy and all his cronies, they're from like the local Men's Shed cause they, they do the walk at Easter. They've done it for the last couple of years and they love it. And they, yeah, 'I'm going to do day nine route this year'. 'Oh, I want to do the day eight route this year'. Fantastic. It's, it really fires up people's imaginations. But I think there's more there that we, we need to tap in to. We just need that recognition. I think once the signage goes up, boom, there'll be a huge upswell particularly this year of the Brigid 1500. Also, it's important to say that from the get-go, from that first year 2013, people have come from Australia, Canada, America. All over Europe, the four corners of Ireland. I mean. Imagine you give up your holidays and you come from Australia, Canada and America. They'd be the furthest away like California and to walk Brigid's Way. I

mean that that just shows you from day one, it's really caught something deep within people. Yeah, yeah, it's. Her reach is very far.

HW

Thank you. How does the facilitated summer pilgrimage differ do you think from a solo guided walk that one might take via the instructions on your website? What do you think the main differences are?

F2

I think the main difference is ceremony and ritual, because those of us who offer to facilitate, to be leaders for particular day we know the sites, we know the wells, we know the Fire Temple and we can offer the stories, we can offer the ritual and over the years, we very much have tried to put that on the website with our little snippet videos so that people, can do this for themselves. But I think any journey Brigid will unfold for you, whatever that might be. So, the people who walked it themselves talk about the connections they make, the people sitting outside their houses giving them a drink of water, the people they meet on the way. So, she's there in whatever way Brigid needs to be there for them. I mean when the signage goes up, and know what I'm saying when the signage goes up, I can see it, and when the app with the, with the app there's huge potential for us to tell the stories and for them to be on the app. So, somebody's walking along and they come to a stop and then one of us is talking about the famine stone in that connection. And then we walk a bit further and I'm telling the story of, Landowner tells the story of her Brigid's Stream, or Founder 3 is talking about her well, or I'm offering people a fire blessing, so that we all have an opportunity to be there on the app in a way that is held for the people who walk solo. But I think whatever way you walk it, it's going to be amazing. It's going to be. And fun.

HW

What type of pilgrim practices do you encourage people to undertake throughout the nine-day journey?

F2

I think, well, first and foremost is an intention at the start. I think that this is not a walk. This is not a stroll down the pier with your dog. This is a pilgrimage, and pilgrimage is by the very nature will bring up things and there's going to be difficult aspects. Otherwise, it wouldn't be a pilgrimage. On the led walks, we encourage people to have three intentions, a personal one; one for family or community; and one for the world. And it's been very poignant, very tender, the types of intentions people have, because often they share with us. I remember one year we walked and there was a man and a woman who had a very difficult first day. Now the first day is only ten miles or thereabouts. It's an easy day. And he was really, really tired. He just realised he wasn't as fit as he thought he was, and the younger woman was actually quite ill. And we happened to have a nurse with us on the trip, and I would be trained in, the leaders were trained in first aid and all that, and I remember the second day coming down to breakfast thinking I wouldn't be surprised if this guy leaves. Well, it was incredible. He led the group. He was the first in from then on. This was the different man that came down. Whatever happened overnight, he manned up. Or he, I don't know, he found a vigour and a fitness that he didn't have. And this wasn't man in his late 60s. And the young woman realised she had a huge, very

quick prophetic dream, a release of something she carried for so long and she flew along the route. And then the next year we had an older man again, he would have been in his late 60s, possibly early 70s and another wonderful woman around 60. And they led the group. In other words, they were the walkers that were at the top of the group every day, and afterwards we found out that both of them are dealing with major physical ailments, like serious, and they literally flew along the route. It meant so much to them. So, there's some of the type of stories that you hear. I mean, I particularly love that we walk solo, and we champion that. We have a little sign, you can put your little Brigid badge to the front, your brooch, or your cross, if you want some quiet time, or then we laugh and we say about getting the stories about how you hear somebody's life story walking along beside them and, and there's great fun. There's laughter. There's songs. There's, it's very special but it is, yeah, it's very different for many people. I'm sorry. I probably went off point there. Did I answer your question?

HW

Yeah, it was about the type of pilgrim practices they have. You've answered the intention setting and thinking.

F2

Oh yeah. So, the intention, then we like to offer Brigid's water blessing at the start. And particularly, Brigid's fire blessing in her fire temple. We like to involve nature, for example. Usually on day three, as we're walking along, we collect nature items that speak of our intentions and then we release them into the River Boyne as we cross. When we get to Slane we have a fire ceremony on the Hill of Slane with the local shamans. And we have a beautiful ceremony on the Hill of Tara with Annette, who's a local druid. Actually, we're very, we're quite diverse, between the Solas Bhríde sisters who are Catholic nuns, the Friends of the Forest who are Church of Ireland; the shamans; the Druids; the pagans. We're just waiting for the Jewish community and the Muslim community to join in, and I think we'll have, we'll be completely, would you say including all faiths and no faiths? Okay.

HW

So I just want to clarify that you researched the route in 2012 and I know you and Founder 3 walked parts of it and you put it together, but you first walked it entire in 2013, is that right? And do you remember how many pilgrims walked the route with you in that summer? And then do you know approximately how many pilgrims have walked part or the whole of the route since its inception?

F2

Yeah. Yeah, so, in 2013. As you can imagine, we'd quite a large number we have over the years had larger groups on the first day and the last day. So, the first day we would have had, oh, at least fifty or sixty people and then we had, I think it was twenty-two on the full nine days. As far as I remember two walked five days with us and, God love us in our innocence, we had a way that people could join us just for a day. And that took an awful lot of administration from the pair of us, so I'd say in total, you know, about a hundred people that first year, more people particularly joined us on the last day. And the Solas Bhríde sisters came into the square to meet us. I mean, it was really phenomenal, Deirdre[?] sang us in, Noreen[?] the next year. It was really special. The second, in 2014, we had 18 pilgrims. 2015 we experimented and we did the two weekends. So, Founder 3 did the first weekend I did the second and we didn't do the interim days, so there would have been about, usually it's around

twenty-three to twenty-five on either days, but we recognised this is a nine day pilgrimage. So, in 2016, Founder 3 led a small pilgrimage which would have been about, I suppose maybe it would have been nine or ten, and then in 2017 myself and Louise O'Donnell, we led one and there would have been oh, no, yeah, there would have been, maybe we were back up to say twenty. And then 2018 there was another. Yeah. It's usually around twenty to twenty-five. That's a good number and to be quite honest, we are limited by the accommodation because, particularly at Donadea and in Robertstown. So, we've got to find beds for people to stay in and over the years we've experimented with, we booked the accommodation for them. We get people to book their own accommodation. That type of thing, I mean we're kind of weaning the pilgrims off us. We're making it, we're, we've consciously headed towards the solo route, purposely heading towards the signage and when people can do it readily by themselves. So, I mean I would say, particularly now the extension of Brigid's Way, the Dublin walk from centre of Dublin City to Clondalkin, that's walked every year for the last, oh my gosh, seven years and we'd have up to thirty to forty people. Then the year the guy did the Patrick to Faughart. So, I mean we're talking over two hundred people who've actually walked the route and then we have, there's a huge knowledge of it. People often say 'oh yeah, that's on my wish list', 'I want to do that', and these are what groups from all over the world which is extraordinary. Yeah. In fact, there could be actually, there's easily more. There must be about five hundred, because if we've had fifty at the start and the end for those years, I mean that, that's one hundred. Anyway, and so I'd say we've had up to five hundred people who've walked some part of it. And then you'd have maybe three hundred who've walked the nine days or thereabouts.

HW

It's a goodly number. The facilitated pilgrimage, there was a skipped year, wasn't there? In the middle of the pandemic. What was that, that was?

F2

Yeah. So, in the pandemic, we, the first year, the pandemic, we did what we call it walk a mile for Brigid. So, we basically, so I basically online live walked a mile for Brigid and everybody all over the world did the same in there, because we could only walk a certain distance. And then the second year, what did we do the second year? We had something similar. We had people walk themselves, but I think that's because it was during this, we couldn't do the accommodation, because a lots of places were still closed where people could walk in in their in their bubble groups. So, we encouraged that. So, we did it all online and we kept it going. And then of course, once we were back, there was a huge surge because again, people were conscious of the time.

HW

That was last year, wasn't it? No, 2022.

F2

2022 yeah, yeah.

HW

Brilliant. Thank you.

Appendix C – Interview With Founder 3

Appendix E – Interview with Founder 3

Before the interview Founder 3 was given the following questions for her consideration:

- How long have you had a connection to Brigid, and could you briefly describe what she means to you?
- I know you have a long connection to Faughart and are one of the organisers of the Brigid of Faughart Festival there. Can you tell me if you know of any twentieth century pilgrim practice that focused either on Brigid's Well on the Hill of Faughart or the Shrine below prior to the Festival which began in 2008?
- Do you know of any medieval pilgrim practice at Faughart?
- After hearing Founder 1's talk in 2012 about a Cygnus alignment between Faughart and Kildare, why were you personally inspired to walk a pilgrimage between these two points in the name of Brigid?
- Whilst Faughart and Kildare both have long historical traditions connected with St. Brigid, how did you and Founder 2 go about researching the route between the two?
- What caused you to think that a pilgrimage route from Faughart to Kildare might have existed prior to the one you dreamed of in 2012?
- Not including Faughart and Kildare, can you speak about the specific parts of the current Brigid's Way route that you have reason to believe had previous pilgrim practice in the name of Brigid associated with it? If you can cite any sources or provide material evidence in addition to local knowledge or hearsay that would be helpful.
- Have you ever set eyes on the research Harold O'Sullivan told Landowner about?
- The Brigid's Way volunteer group are actively seeking official signage for the route. What would this type of recognition and signage mean for Brigid's Way?
- What do you feel Brigid's Way offers pilgrims today? Why do you think people choose to walk it?
- How does the route impact the communities it passes through do you think?
- What type of pilgrim practices do you encourage people to undertake on a Brigid pilgrimage?
- Why do you think the popularity of Brigid is on the increase within Ireland today, and why does she draw visitors from overseas?

Interview Transcript from 7th March 2024

HW

Okay, So Founder 3, how long have you had a connection to Brigid, and could you briefly describe what she means to you? What's your understanding of her?

F3

Right, ok. I grew up, I didn't go, I live in Dundalk, or I live in Ravensdale. My house is in a direct line with the Hill of Faughart. I didn't know that when I built it, and it was like, which is where the Bridget's memorial places are in this part of the country. I never heard of Bridget much when I was growing up. It wasn't part of my education at all. I went to a Catholic boarding school, and we talked about, you know, Saint Francis of Assisi and Ignatius, and all that kind of thing, but not of Bridget. So, I didn't know anything about Bridget. And I was living in Dundalk. And then I went to Faughart, which is a place outside Dundalk where and it is said that she lived, that she grew up as a young, as a young girl and a young woman, and that she worked there and that, then eventually she went to Kildare, Okay. Now I went to Faughart many times and something in my going to Faughart awakened some connection with this, with this deity I suppose, or this archetypal energy really, of Bridget. Now I had no understanding of Bridget really. I mean, we would have learned that the three patron saints of Ireland were St Patrick, St Bridget, and St Colum Cille. There were the three people who were referenced as settling in their Celtic Christian tradition within Ireland, and Patrick, I never had any time for and so he didn't, and I often used to say, and this is an important piece, it's a kind of a throw away phase, but it's much more than that, because I say Patrick came into Ireland, Bridget came out of Ireland. In other words, she came out of the land of Ireland. She came out of the stories, she came out of the mythology of Ireland, whereas Patrick, him as a, as not an invader, but an intruder. Maybe not an intruder, but he didn't come from this place. He was not from this. He didn't have his origins there. I think that's very important. Bridget, so I started to think about Bridget. I don't know when maybe. Maybe twenty or more years ago, maybe more. I'm not sure exactly, but I remember going to Faughart and being absolutely amazed by how I felt there, and I suppose my awakening, the awakening of the Bridget energy within me, which is what I see, is what has happened. That's why I connect with Faughart, because that's the energy that's there was, was slow. Because I wasn't, I wasn't I'm not from this area. Whereas people who grew up in this area would have been going to, their mothers would have wheeled them in the pram to Faughart. This was the destination, as they say nowadays, where you brought your children, you'd go for a walk from town out to Faughart. It was three miles or something or four miles. So, a lot of people would hear that, I know would have grown up knowing about Bridget since they were small, and they would have learned it all in school as well. And everybody made Bridget's Crosses. I didn't have that experience because I grew up a bit away and then I went to a boarding school which was very Catholic, of course, but it wasn't, it wasn't connected with the Celtic tradition. It was much more connected with the Roman tradition, and I mean, the Loreto nuns were very much connected with, I can't remember her name. Mary Ward, she was the founder of the of the order, but it was not at all Irish, you know. So, there was no connection there. And so, they, the spirit, the religion that I learned there was very much Catholic and very much, and it was only when in many, many years after I left school, after I left university, and when I came to live here, I met a wonderful teacher called Seán Ó Duinn. He was a monk in Glenstal Abbey and he spoke about the Celtic spiritual tradition. Up until then, I never knew there was such a thing. And I remembered before that I was, I was working with a group of Americans in Tara, the Hill of Tara, which is one of the really sacred places in Ireland, and I was only beginning to do this work, it was 1988 and we were, this woman had asked me if I would join the group of people and bring people around different sacred sites of Ireland, so I said I would, but really I said, I don't know that much about them, but in the journey and a lot of things came up for me and one of them was that I began to realise that I had no connection with the ancient tradition, spiritual tradition of Ireland. Because my

connection was with Catholicism and which was, we did have Celtic Christian Christianity, but that wasn't emphasised where I was at school. It wasn't emphasised in the 60s or 70s. So, Father Seán Ó Duinn then was a monk in Glenstal Abbey and he was a wonderful pioneer of the Celtic spiritual tradition. And he was a teacher. He was a really knowledgeable, learned, very beautiful man, and I was really blessed to have him as a teacher. And I used to sometimes meet him in Dublin, and we'd have coffee and he'd be writing on the napkins in the restaurant the things he wanted me to remember, and but, so that was how it started for me. And then then you know, it's when something starts like that. I started to go to many different places. And when I started to go, I had very little, experience of noticing or feeling the energy in the land. I was a well-trained a biochemist. I lectured in biochemistry for ten years. I was very much in my head. And so, the idea of being connected through your feet to the earth was something I had to learn. It wasn't something that was natural for me, but I remember being in Tara, and I remember there was an awakening moment there. And I've had many awakening moments and Tara, that was one of the first ones. And I thought, oh my God, there's a whole other part of the Irish Celtic culture that I have never heard of. It came as a knowing, so that set me on a journey, you know, and on a, I suppose a pilgrimage, a long pilgrimage. That was about thirty years ago. And yeah, so anyway, so then I began to study the Celtic spiritual tradition with Seán Ó Duinn, and I also then on that hear about Bridget. And then I understood from those conversations that Bridget was a very ancient figure in Ireland, not just a Celtic Christian saint, she was actually a goddess, and she was not just a goddess in the pre-Christian time, but she was a goddess in the pre-Celtic time. So, her lineage went way back into the into the into history, into even prehistory. So, there was something about the antiquity about the ancientness of who she was and what she was bringing, that I as some unconscious level really needed, and was delighted to embrace. So, I spent a lot of time studying all of that and then go to Faughart. You can stop me anytime you want to.

HW

That's going to be hard. I'm loving listening.

F3

So, going to Faughart, I remember going. I remember going on the Bridget's Day, but I was just beginning this kind of thing and I didn't know much about it, but we went. We didn't get wet. We got absolutely drowned. With rain. And I mean thinking she expects us to come here if she's going to pour rain in on top of us. Anyway, that's a joke. But anyways, so we came. So I started, was at the time doing rituals for the eight seasons of the Celtic year. I was fascinated by the eight seasons of the Celtic year and I've written quite a lot about that. And I've not only written about it by also organised rituals to celebrate the four major festivals, which is Samhain and both Bealtaine and Lughnasa, and I would go to other places to do the in between ones which were winter solstice, like go to Newgrange, and spring equinox usually go to Loughcrew, Sliabh Na Calliagh, and June I'd go somewhere in the South, maybe Lough Gur, and then, Lughnasa, I would go, Lughnasa is very connected with County Louth where I live and with the god Lugh. So, there was there were these different, there were these different kinds of celebrations. But when I, when I went to, when I went to Tara that time, something deep awakened in me and I realised I had to do this journey now, like I'm sure you know, and none of this is clear in the moment you're doing it. It's only retrospect. I thought on the journey, so I was very, very interested in all of this and I loved it. It really fired my soul, and it made me feel much more whole than many of the Catholic practises that I did. I loved being out in the land. I loved walking the

land. It took me a long time to feel the energies that people were talking about because I didn't, I didn't get it. You know what, I mean I couldn't feel them, and I was really afraid to say I couldn't, you know, but it took a long time. Because as I said, I was very much in my head and even in the spirituality that I thought I was still fairly in my head, you know. So but anyway, that's an awful, rambling answer to your question. So, I found a great blessing in Faughart, and I love to go. I still go there very, very often and there's a big roundabout outside, Dundalk, which is left for Faughart, and the second left is for my house and so often I find myself taking the first left and I'm in Faughart before I've known it. But it's very Bridget, the energy of Bridget is the energy of mother of compassion, and of deep, deep wisdom. And I think that's very different from a lot of what I learned in the more Roman Catholic tradition.

HW

Thank you.

F3

And that was exciting. Exciting for me, yeah.

HW

Thank you. So, I know you've had a long connection to Faughart, which you've obviously just chatted about and you are one of the organisers of the Brigid of Faughart Festival there. Can you tell me if you know of any twentieth century pilgrim practise that focused either on Bridget's Well on the Hill of Faughart, right at the top, or on the shrine below, prior to the festival that you created? So just like a bit longer [?] history of what you know?

F3

Yes. Well, what I know about is that in 1934, I was just reading this to remember there was there was a Bishop, either a Bishop or a Cardinal, I'm not sure which, and I can send you the name. MacRory, I think was his name, and he organised a national pilgrimage to Faughart Shrine in 1934 and 10,000 people came from all over Ireland, in cars and tractors and buses and everything. And apparently it was totally spectacular. Now it, the place would have been very simple there. There wouldn't have been very much at that moment, There's lots of things that are different, but that was the beginning of the modern, I think. You see, I'm not from here, so I would know all the ... [?]. Many of my friends who grew up here would have gone to Faughart many, many times a year, as do their parents, would they'd walk out from Dundalk, out to it and they, you know, they had great devotion to Bridget, and the devotion involved going to the stream, there's a stream and there's a well, but the stream is in one place, the well is up on the hill. There would, I mean, would have had many places where people would go, and there's all these holy stones. So, there's a stone. Have you been?

HW

Oh yes, I think several times to Faughart, it's one of my favourite Brigid places I have to say, but on the top of the hill, I mean both places I've had very strong experiences there, yeah.

F3

Okay, so you know what we're talking. Did I meet you at the pilgrimage? I did some time at ...

HW

Yes.

F3

Then yes I did.

HW

We met; I met you in 2017 when I came to Ireland to, you know, researching Bridget and my own personal pilgrimage, and then I met you again in this year. Well, last year, 2023. And we walked a bit on day nine, the last day together and we had.

F3

Yes. All right. Yes, yes, I remember that. Sorry. Sorry, I.

HW

A chat. It's all right. There was a lot of people there and you've met a lot of people in between.

F3

Yeah, and sometimes. Yeah. Well, yeah. But anyway, so, where were we, so, right, so, we started with the, we started with the pilgrim... No, sorry, we started with the festival, way back, I think, let me see, when did we start with the festival? This is the 17th year. So I think we start in 2008 something like that, and it was a very simple and a very small event, and we had maybe one or two talks and we brought people to Faughart. And as I said, raining, absolutely drowned us and people say that's an initiation. I'm sure it is. And but there was something that grew within me. As those things happened and it was my awareness of my connection in somehow with Bridget. It's not easy to talk about this in a linear way, because these are not linear experiences. They're much deeper than that, and sometimes when we try to capture them in words, they're it's, underestimates what they are, but I had this sense of feeling at home. That's what I would say at home with Bridget, at home in a way that I hadn't felt maybe so much in say in in a lot of the Catholic practises. That it was good. I still love the Eucharist. I still go when there is family occasions and I enjoy it. It doesn't do for me what going to Faughart does. And that's, you know, when I go to Faughart I feel a connection with the beings, with Bridget and with the land. And I think that's the, and this is something I'm just thinking about this today because I'm working on it, on a paper, and it's like the problem with so much of Christianity was that it was too, it separated Heaven from Earth. It didn't integrate them. So, it was always, you know, about pie in the sky when you die. You know, kind of thing. So, it was always about that, but for me, the spirituality that I have, to live, and that supports me is not only that, but that in relationship with my understanding of being a spiritual being on planet Earth, which is also spiritual. Does that make sense?

HW

Yes. Yes, very much so. Yes. Thank you for bringing that point in so. In your, your research and your knowledge of people locally, do you know, I ... [?] you know, Faughart has been a destination. If even if destination is the right word for pilgrims since probably mediaeval times, there was a slight documentation around that and I know it has ebbed and flowed, so you know the popularity has waned at times and then it's been revived. And like you said in 1934 there was the new shrine was built and everything. Do you know of, to your knowledge of any pilgrim practise? In documentation prior to 1934.

F3

No, I don't. I don't know. And I wouldn't even know where to go to look. But, but just as I said that, I said, there wouldn't have been a national pilgrimage in 1934 if there hadn't been practises before that exactly, that's true. So, far, I mean people around here in Dundalk, the town beside us, I mean, they have such devotion, you know. And so, for example, in the town on the three nights, before the Eve of Bridget's Day and the 1st of February and the 2nd of February, they have what's called a tridium. That's three, and there are prayers. I don't go to that now myself, but and I don't know that I ever did but, and it's so an awful lot of people would celebrate Bridget in that way within the church. Yeah. Now we have a church at Faughart and it's a very modern church which was built or paid for by some American person or other. And but it's never open, you know, it's only open, that's kind of sad, you know, but it's lovely. It's hexagonal and octagonal. Sorry, I think. Yeah. Which is a six or eight? Yes, it doesn't matter anyway, but the thing about it is people here in this area have a great devotion to Bridget, as their local saint and what they see really is, this is an intermediary between us humans and divine.

HW

Thank you. So, in when in 2012, I believe when you heard Founder 1's talk about the Cygnus alignment and about this alignment of monuments up between Faughart and Kildare, why were you personally inspired to walk a pilgrimage between these two points in the name of Brigid?

F3

Yes. Yes, yes. Yeah. Well, it's very interesting. The answer is I don't know. And I always say it was Founder 2's idea and she says it was mine. I don't know. I said some divine madness took hold of the two of us. And so, we set out, you know, and I don't know why I couldn't give you a really, there was no very well formed idea. But I love the idea of pilgrimage, because I think pilgrimage is a wonderful way in which to connect with the divine within ourselves and in the Earth. So, I love the idea of pilgrimage. I wanted to do the Camino many, many years ago, and to Santiago, and I was all ready to go, everything booked, everything, whatever. And I got a terrible chest infection, and I couldn't go and I cancelled it, and I said I'd go again. And then I was with somebody having a reading and I mentioned it, they said 'you don't need to do that pilgrimage. You've done it many times in other lifetimes, so you don't need to'. I've never had any interest in doing it since. Isn't that interesting, but when the idea of walking a pilgrimage from Faughart to Kildare that really excited me, like we could go. And we went. When we looked at it with Founder 1, and he was a great part of this, when we looked with Founder 1 to that, seeing this line, we discovered that there was so many sacred sites on the way. It's

quite amazing. So, I think that was it was the idea. That we would be walking on a very ancient pilgrim path. But, but generally on a trajectory that was linking the two places between, very dedicated to Bridget, Faughart and Kildare

HW

Thank you.

F3

And yeah, and I think that, I think that it was very exciting. Like I can still see us leaving Dundalk on that day. We left Faughart and then next day we left Dundalk to a brass band and all kinds of things coming and going. And it was wonderful, and we felt like we were doing something really important, you know, not an egotistical kind of way. It just felt, oh my God, this feels really right. And lots of people came not for the whole pilgrimage. So, as we walked, I suppose what I learned, is that pilgrimage is that, I mean, I love walking as one of my great pastimes, but there's a difference between going for a walk and going on a pilgrimage walk. And the difference is the intention. So, everything energy follows intention. So, if you're setting the intention that you will get in touch with some deep spiritual realities within your life, well, that's what's going to happen. You're going to. That's going to happen, and they come to everybody in different ways. And when we did that for us pilgrimage, it was wonderful to listen to people at the end of the day just talking about some of the insights that they got about them about themselves, about where they were in their lives, because excuse me, when you're on a pilgrimage, it's such a, it's a kind of a real privilege because you're outside the norm, and you don't have to listen to the news, and you don't listen to the news and so you don't. And you walk, and all you have to do is walk in presence. Now that was really, really important. And I loved it. I absolutely loved it, and we all enjoyed it very much. Now it was tough some days, because like even though I'm a good walker, I might be used to walking fifteen kilometres or twenty kilometres. But it was marvellous. Because if anybody, we took breaks, it wasn't a run, it was, it was not meant to be a punishment. It was meant to be something which would be very enjoyable, and it was. And you know, there were marvellous conversations. I love the way we'd fall into conversations, so I might be in conversation with you and then we might stop and whatever, and then somebody else is in conversation with me. So, it was, it was a very special way to travel, and I think one of the things that was very interesting was that mostly we all left our egos with our backpacks because we're all pilgrims and we were all finding it hard at different times. And you know, there was no, 'you have to get there'. If you didn't, we always had a support car. So, if you couldn't walk the next four miles, you could get a lift and there was no shame in that. And then you take it, get out and walk again. And so, all of that. So, there was something very deeply, human and deeply ecological about walking around in Ireland and I know in Britain it would be the same. People walked; they went for huge walks. Walking was always understood as a way to step out of your life. Out of your external life to step into your interior life and to in the doing of that discover things about yourself, to discover things about the land and maybe get lots of important insight. That's why people went, you know. Unfortunately, in Ireland it was part of the very [?]istic view of Christianity where everybody, it had to be painful. It doesn't have to be painful, you know, and if it doesn't hurt, it can't be any good, you know, which I never, ever believed in. So that's why we always had a support car. And if people couldn't walk the next mile or two miles or three miles, they could take a lift. Then there was no shame in that. Yes. And it didn't matter whether you walked all the pilgrimage or not, because

your intention was to walk the path and whether you walked that in a car, as part of the way, or on the bicycle, or on your feet. It didn't matter. That was the intention was to walk and to walk through the land. And that was a lovely. I mean that was one of the loveliest things. Like you know, when you're in the car you don't see anything. Walking on small roads and seeing all the different varieties of bushes, flowers and people and animals, it was, it was very special. And it you have to slow right down in order to be present. And I think that was one of the really big gifts of pilgrimage for me was the presence.

HW

Thank you. Thank you. So, whilst Faughart and Kildare both have long historical traditions connected to St Brigid, how did you and Founder 2 go about researching the routes between the two? How did you think, okay, this must have been, because obviously you're thinking that, from what I've gathered from what you've just said, it's obvious that you were basing it on this alignment of monuments, but you had an understanding that the tradition is that Brigid has moved from Faughart to Kildare, so therefore you're re-enacting, as it were, the route that she walked. So how did you go about researching?

F3

But also, it was that Cygnus constellation, which was mirrored on the Earth and it was mirrored on the Earth with monuments. So, we walked from Faughart. So, the first time we walked from Faughart and we went to the road of Dundalk, past that and we went to Ardee, and let me see now. And. Yes, yeah, Ardee, and then we, Ardee. It didn't have that many connections, but it was you know, the direct way through. It had a connection, of course, with Cú Chulainn and with Ferdia, and various things like that. So, then we walked to Slane, and of course, Slane was the ecclesiastical capital of Christianity at one stage. There was the Hill of Slane and the Hill of Tara, and Tara was seen as the pre-Christian, the Hill of Slane was seen as Christian, and there's a story, told that St Patrick, he put out the, you know that story? He lit the fires on Slane. Yes, there's a direct conflict with the old really, yeah. Of course it was. Yeah. Yeah. So, I mean, that was a really, I don't identify much with the energy at Slane. I have to say I don't find it comfortable and, but it was a good place to be. And it's a wonderful vista all around the country, from the Hill of Slane. So, then we went from Slane, we went towards Tara, and it took quite a bit to get to Tara. Quite a long walk, you know. And then of course, Tara is so, so much, so pivotal, because Tara is the, is one of the main centres of Ireland. We have Tara and Uisneach. Uisneach is connected with the heart chakra, and Tara is more connected with the head chakra. So Uisneach is very much connected with the with the divine. Tara is too, but in a different way. And Tara has been, Tara is a is like a crossroads and basically there's so many different things that emanate from Tara, come out from Tara, and when you're in Tara and it's only a very small hill, but you can see absolutely huge amount, it's just all over. So, you can see Loughcrew. You can see way over to Longford. You can see up to Armagh. So you can see it's a hugely important place from that point of view. But it was also a place of great ritual and of grace and it was where the kings were inaugurated. So, it was very, very important. And Uisneach. While Tara was associated with the kings, Uisneach is associated with goddess. That was very different. But yes, so, Tara was a wonderful experience to be there in pilgrimage and to walk in there a big group of us, having walked all the way from Faughart, it was really quite special, you know. So yeah, so then, so then from Tara, we went down, we used to have a map on this, doesn't seem to be here, so from Tara we, the next bit is going, is going all the way down

towards Kildare and it's again, what was lovely was, sorry Day Five, so Tara to Moynalvey, 'moving towards our destinations'. So, we walked away leaving Tara. We walked down through a very, very fertile part of Ireland and we eventually arrive, and we eventually arrived to our accommodation. This was somewhere in the middle of nowhere, I think. Oh no, in Trim. That's right. That's so. And it's a while since I've done it, but so that again was it was a very gentle walk because it was all flat. With the heartland of Ireland in some way through Tara. And in a very fertile part of Ireland because Meath is very, very fertile. So, then we got to Moynalvey, and then we walked to Donadea Forest Park, and we were moving out of County Meath, and going into County Kildare and again, it was going on the road I haven't got the map. I'm sorry because I thought it was on that. Yeah. So we go, and I think it was about the continuity and it was about setting off on a pilgrimage and walking it every day, no matter how we felt. I don't mean us in a self-abusive way, but if you are tired you walk slowly. If you're energetic, you walked fast. If you needed a lift, you got a lift, but you stayed on the path even if you didn't walk every step. It wasn't about that. And we made that very important because we can all get it, and most of us have been educated into like you have to do it the way it says in the book or you're wrong. And there's a lot of that, but we didn't have that. And so there and there was a lovely come camaraderie that developed. So, you might be walking on your own sometimes. You might be walking with a group of people and that would change, and the conversations would change, and we sang quite a lot, you know, singing the road and we sang songs that people thought would be nice, that they would enjoy. And we also, in the little booklet that we prepared, we had a lot of prayers and poem. That we would sometimes, really at the beginning of at the beginning of each day, you know, and one of them, well, I read one of them for you. I can give it to you anyway. Yes. 'The Blessing for a Journey'. 'Bless to me oh God, the earth beneath my feet. Bless to me oh God, the path on where I go. Bless to me oh God, with things of my desire. Bless thou ever more, ever more. Blessed to me my rest. And as thou was before my life's beginning, be thou there at my journey's end. And as thou was beside my soul shaping, thou would be as my journey slows'. So that whole idea of journey, which is what our lives are our journey, you know, the other one that was really important to us, was 'The Guesthouse', because when you're on a pilgrimage, you know that poem by Rumi. But what? What the? I'm only going to read. One line of it is. Okay, 'This being human is a guesthouse every morning and you arrive and joy or depression and meanness, some momentary awareness that comes as an unexpected visitor welcome them all and entertain them, though they may be a crowd of sorrows', and then says 'be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent. As a guide from beyond', and it's that whole idea that we are, even though we're here in this physical world, we're walking and also being guided from the other side. And I like that.

HW

Thank you. So, I've had a chat with, obviously I had to chat with Founder 1 and Founder 2 and Landowner, and talking to Landowner she mentioned the research that Harold O'Sullivan told her about the land. Have you ever clapped eyes on the actual research that Harold O'Sullivan did, or what he referred to.

F3

No, I haven't. I mean, he's dead a long time now. I have heard him. Yeah, but does Landowner not have a copy of?

HW

No she doesn't.

F3

You'd probably get it in the archaeology.

HW

I've tried. I've tried and I've tried and I've not got anywhere with the local archaeological group, so I would love to pin it down.

F3

Sorry. What about Founder 1?

HW

He doesn't know either.

F3

OK. All right. He doesn't know either. OK, right.

HW

Yeah. So, I think that's for a local Dundalk person to kind of possibly track down. I've tried, I'm still on the case. But I just wondered if you'd ever seen.

F3

OK. And I never even looked for it Heidi, because it wasn't where my focus was, you know.

HW

Yeah.

F3

But I'm surprised Landowner doesn't know anything. Well, would the library be a place, that local library in Dundlak, library Dundalk, museum?

HW

Maybe. Yes. Landowner only knows what Harold told her, but not where he got that information from.

F3

Yes, yes, yes. I mean, I know that story. I mean, she told me that many times and she had a friend from Cork whose name I can't remember who came, and she seemed to have she picked up some psychically when she was walking on, I don't remember the woman's name. It's many years ago, but

she seemed to have quite clear information about different places on the walk, like where, where people crossed over the river, the lake, the river and the street where people did various things. But. I haven't walked the pilgrimage for a few years now. The last time I went to walk it I was very sick, and I didn't know what was wrong with me and we got halfway through Landowner's land and I collapsed and I had COVID. And I didn't know what.

HW

You don't want to be walking a pilgrimage with.

F3

I know. And I'd walked ten kilometres. I don't know how I did it, anyway? But so, I don't know. Since I was there. But. Just know that, I know this might sound a bit silly, but for me it's much more. It's an inner experience. And you know, I never paid a huge amount of attention to all the externals because that wasn't what it was for me. Now, actually, it would be much better at that. And Founder 2 even as well, but you know, but I think we need both. And they were doing those, those important pieces, yeah.

HW

So, the volunteer group Brigid's Way, I know that you are still involved, but you don't have a hand in all the admin and all of that anymore. But I know, yeah, And the group at the moment, they're seeking official signage for the route. So what type of recognition, what would that type of recognition and signage mean for Brigid's Way do you think?

F3

I think it would be really a wonderful step forward. I think that probably, and this is interesting, now that it's, maybe because we started this in a very simple way and we didn't have big guns behind us, you know, we didn't get that. We tried, I know Founder 2 applied several times and I did too with her. But at the time, maybe we didn't have enough traction. But now when we started the pilgrimage in 2000 and?

HW

I think it was first walked in 2013. I know you kind of got the idea in 2012.

F3

Yeah. Yeah. So that's ten or eleven years. Yeah, yeah. So therefore, I mean, at this stage, I think it would be much easier to apply for signage for two reasons. One, because pilgrimage is becoming so trendy and sexy and all that kind of thing, but also because it's like we got funding this year for the Bridgid of Faughart Festival because we have proved ourselves over. We've been doing the festival for seventeen years and that's a lot of time, you know, and we get massive funding. What, we got what we needed, and we, what was more important we got recognition. Like I was at the launch of one of the events by the local Council and the chairperson, she twice, hearing her talk, congratulated the Bridgid of Faughart Festival team on keeping going. I'm not saying that there's any personal thing we did, but she, we having this celebration. If we hadn't done that. And that's I think why, and you know

and one of the things I've learned is my whole life, I've been on the edge. So, there are people who pioneer, and they plough a furrow. And it's hard work. And you don't get much recognition, but that's what we signed up to do, Founder 3 and myself and Nancy. So, because we did that to the best of our ability, people like Bebhinn and all the other people who came in after, and Tracy and all of those, they have a different job to do. But if we didn't do the job we did, that's what I think. And it's not about one being better than another. It's an unfolding process. So, we couldn't have looked for signage before we had done the pilgrimage many times and showed that it was possible. Now I think, one of the problems with signage as far as I know, is that if you put signage up, the question would be, does that in any way imply that the Council is responsible for this? But you know all of, but it does, a big thing about signage. Also, you know you know any pilgrimage paths, I mean you have to, there are lots of them in Ireland. Saint Declan's way, there's a whole lot of them, but it's like who, who are the holders of it, who are responsible for it, and who, if you break your leg or I break my leg, who is responsible? Of course, I believe I'm responsible and you know, but in the world that we live in, somebody would want to have, you know, so those are. Kind of tricky.

HW

Thanks.

F3

And I think that might be. Why we still haven't got signage. I'd love to see signage and I think it would make a huge, it would increase the visibility of Brigid's Way, and therefore it was increased the visibility of Bridget, which she's rising in Ireland and all over the world, I mean. I don't know if you saw any of the stuff we had on the Bridget Festival there, and just see the amazing lights.

HW

Yes, yes.

F3

Stunning. You know, you know, and I mean like. I was just talking to somebody today and the very first time we went to Kildare, myself and Maura Lennon, who's one of the founders of the Bridget of Faughart Festival, and we went to Kildare to take the light back, a light from Kildare. And we came back with it, and we stood in the square, and maybe ten of us on a freezing cold day. And we had a light, candle that that this guy Martin put in a green filter over and that's what we had. And I said to somebody and that was how these lights came to be. [in reference to the lights of the recent Brigid celebrations in Dundalk town centre] You know. Yeah. And so, I think what is really important is that we value whatever peace we're in and we can't run ahead and we can't run back. We have to be, 'this is where this pilgrimage is now. This is where this festival is now. We we've come from there, we're going to there', but we don't know how that's going to happen. I think pilgrimage is extraordinarily mystical really. Yeah. Okay, the route is out there, you know. But it's like nobody, when you set out on any of the days of the Brigid's Way pilgrimage, nobody knows what's going to happen. We don't know where, we know where we're supposed to be, but we don't know. On phones within that day, and I think that that's what the mystery is. And pilgrimage is very mysterious, and I think in the mediaeval times, and even in our own time, when people go on a on a on a pilgrimage, they go to find themselves. They're walking their lives I think, that's their life.

HW

How do you think the route as in the pilgrimage itself impacts the communities that it goes through?

F3

I would say very little. In my own experience, but then I haven't been on it for a few years. I mean, certainly people were interested in what we were doing, and they came out and some people often just see and things like that. But I think it was fairly uninteresting to them, into the areas that they went through. Some places we would stop. There were beautiful churches in the towns there. Magnificent stained glass. Harry Clarke stained-glass windows. So, we stopped and we went in there, and then there were other places, you know, where? I wouldn't. I don't think there was a massive impact on the community.

HW

Or negative impact, I mean it could be positive impact as well, so.

F3

Oh no, I'm not talking about negative, and I don't think there was any impact. I mean, I don't think because we moved through it. If so, if we were walking through your village there and we have our lunch on the side of the road, you know, whatever, please sit and walk on. I think when we started the pilgrimage, people used to blow their horns and they put down the window and say keep going, keep going. So, I think it had quite, I think people were delighted with it, but not that they actually knew and all thought about it.

HW

Yes. So, what type of pilgrim practises do you encourage people to undertake on a Brigid pilgrimage?

F3

Well, the one of the most important ones, is silence. Walking in silence is very important. Not for all of the time, but when you feel called to that inner silence. I think it's really important to honour that, and then just say to the people around you I'm going to be in silence. And in fact, I think some years we actually had little badges, or something like that. But I think that's one of them. And prayer. And prayer you know, it's funny, for some reason I suddenly remembered a few months ago, the definition of prayer that I learned in primary school and that prayer is a lifting up of the heart and mind to God, however you understand God. So, it's about getting out of the ego and being in that place of the divine aspect of you connected to the Divine, to God. You know something like that. You know, so yeah, I think that and I think the silence. And there were many times when you know the group would go into silence, and that's really powerful. And I went to boarding school, you know we forever being put in silence. So, silence was very hard for me when I got out of boarding school, but I now understand the value, because it's, it's what pilgrimage is like, shutting down the chatter, the busy mind that goes on and on and on and on. And it's like, can you allow yourself the gift of the spaciousness? And I had a lovely article on pilgrimage, and there's one lovely that I think would be really important and I will send you these, these articles. And, do you know the work of Nigel Pennick?

HW

Yes, yes, I do.

F3

Yeah, it was beautiful. I love that. One of my favourite books from Celtic Spirit... [?] speaks about the poetic vision of landscape, which he says is ensouled with the spirit as a particularly human and humane vision of the world. In this vision, everything is seen as subject, not object, and spoken about by its own name. This may indeed be a more wholesome vision of the earth than the soullessness we preach...[?]. It doesn't matter, but it's this whole idea that when we can stop and allow the numinous aspect of the land to break in on our consciousness, then we are transformed, and so is the earth. So, it's hard to, it's hard to answer some of these questions. I can't answer them in a linear way because they're not really linear questions.

HW

No, that's fine. You answered really that. Thank you. I really appreciate it.

F3

Yeah. The thing about it is, I do think a pilgrimage is a wonderful way for people to take time out of their lives and allow the deepest part of them to emerge. In order to do that, they must, I think, step out of the constant chatter, chatter, chatter, which is merely distraction. And you know, and allow that deep, deep inner wisdom to come through.

HW

Perfect place to end.

Appendix D - Brigid

Brigid, one of the patron saints of Ireland, often referred to as its matron saint, is a beloved figure whose life is purported to have spanned the late fifth and early sixth centuries.¹⁹⁹ Although dates for her life are not certain, she is thought to have lived to at least seventy years of age, and her death has been traditionally marked in Ireland as the year 524 AD.²⁰⁰ Fortunately, there is extant hagiography for Brigid. The first mention of her is one of praise in St Ultan's hymn titled *Brigit Bé Bithmaith*, or Brigit, Excellent Woman, from the first half of the seventh century.²⁰¹ Ultan's disciple, St Broccan, composed a biographical hymn about her, which is a considerably longer piece at fifty-three stanzas.²⁰² Two 'Lives' were also written down in the seventh century, the *Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae and Vita Sanctae Brigitae*, (*Vita I* and *Vita II*).²⁰³ There has been much debate about which was written first, although there is a strong case for the *Vita II* being earlier.²⁰⁴ Connolly puts *Vita II* no later than 650AD and *Vita I* between 650-675AD.²⁰⁵ It is generally accepted that *Vita I* was penned by St Ailerán, not Ultan, and Cogitosus, a monk from within her own monastery in Kildare, names himself as the author of *Vita II*.²⁰⁶ The cult of Brigid was obviously expanding in the seventh century given that these four early sources are contemporary, and it is from them that her life and her importance within the early church can be pieced together. *Vita I* is the lengthier hagiography and provides details of Brigid's birth and childhood, followed by her ministry.²⁰⁷ Cogitosus' official *Vita* is focused on her miracles and the monastic life, promoting Kildare 'theologically, institutionally and politically', and includes little about her life prior to the foundation of her church.²⁰⁸ The following later works contain information taken from these first four sources: a third *Vita* from the eight or early ninth century; the *Bethu Brigte* in Old Irish from the early ninth century; and a poem by St Colman, also from the early ninth century.²⁰⁹ The *Leabhar Breac*, or Speckled Book, from the early fourteen century also contains a reproduction of the *Vita I* in the form of a homily.²¹⁰

Whilst the hagiography paints a picture of the saint by setting out her miracles and her establishment of the double monastery at Kildare, the stories and traditions that surround her have grown with time, and it is many of those that influenced later pilgrim practice. Her 'Lives' inform that Brigid, was

¹⁹⁹ Kissane, *Saint Brigid Of Kildare*, pp. 17-19. For 'matron saint', see Deirdre Falvey, 'St Brigid's Day: Events Celebrating Our Matron Saint And Irish Women Around Ireland And The World', *The Irish Times*, (2023), <<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/2023/01/28/st-brigids-day-events-celebrating-our-matron-saint-and-irish-women-around-the-world/>> [accessed 16th April 2024].

²⁰⁰ Kissane, *Saint Brigid Of Kildare*, p. 19. For the nationwide events of 'Brigid 1500' commemorating one thousand five hundred years since the death of St Brigid in 2024, see Brigid 1500, 'About St. Brigid', *Brigid 1500*, 2024.

²⁰¹ Phillip Campbell, 'Introduction: 'Brigit, Excellent Woman'', *The Life Of St. Brigid Of Kildare By Cogitosus And Other Selected Writings*, ed. by Jesse Griffiths, (Michigan, USA: Cruachan Hill Press, 2022), pp. 1-34 (p. 5).

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ For *Vita II*, see Campbell, 'Introduction: 'Brigit, Excellent Woman'', pp. 6-7.

²⁰⁴ Seán Connolly, 'Cogitosus's Life Of St Brigit: Content And Value', *The Journal Of The Royal Society Of Antiquaries Of Ireland*, 117, (1987), 5-27 (p. 5) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25508920>> [accessed 30th March 2024].

²⁰⁵ Ibid. For 650-675AD, see Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae Background And Historical Value', p. 6.

²⁰⁶ Campbell, 'Introduction: 'Brigit, Excellent Woman'', p. 6.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 7-9.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 8-9. For the promotion of Kildare's status, see Johnston, 'Making St Brigit Real In The Early Middle Ages', p. 8.

²⁰⁹ Campbell, 'Introduction: 'Brigit, Excellent Woman'', p. 10.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

born to Dubthach, a nobleman or local chieftain of Leinster, and to Broiseach, a slave or concubine.²¹¹ A 'sept of the Fothairt' is indicated for her kin, although she was 'more closely allied with the Laigin', the people of Leinster, amongst whom the *Fothairt* were settled.²¹² She spent part her early years in the home of a druid, and was probably deemed one of the 'half-free'.²¹³ It is not conclusive as to whether she was raised as a Christian, but it is safe to say there were both pagan and Christian influences around her.²¹⁴ Her own charitable mind and her devotion to God and Christ became evident whilst she was still a child, and it is whilst working on the farm as a girl that her miracles began.²¹⁵ When older, perhaps around the age of fifteen, she refused to marry and became a nun.²¹⁶ Then she began her own ministry, and eventually gained land in Kildare from the king of Leinster, where she founded her monastery as an abbess. Cogitosus' account focuses on Brigid's activity in and around Kildare, and whilst *Vita I* does present a better chronology of and corresponding topography overall, it only does so with specificity once Brigid has taken the veil.²¹⁷ Whilst the place of her death is specifically relayed as Kildare, different interpretations of the texts exist regarding the place of her birth.²¹⁸ One tradition holds that she was born in Umeras, near Monasterevin in Co. Kildare, and the other, perhaps more widely known, has Faughart in Co. Louth as her birthplace.²¹⁹ Therefore, Brigid's association with Faughart and Kildare has been the basis for pilgrim practice in these two places and for the creation of a pilgrimage between them.

For the purpose of understanding the variety of modern pilgrimage motivations and ideas about Brigid, it is important to note here that for some Brigid is not a saint, but a pre-Christian goddess, and for others she is a syncretised figure exhibiting the qualities of both.²²⁰ Both 'Brigit the goddess' and 'Sanct Brigit' are mentioned, under separate entries, in *Sanas Chormaic* (Cormac's Glossary) of the ninth century.²²¹ Very little information about the Irish deity exists, and her character has been primarily constructed from Cormac's description and her brief appearances in the *Cath Maige Tuired* (Second Battle of Moytura) from the ninth or tenth century and the *Lebar Gabála Éirenn* (The Book of The Taking of Ireland) from the eleventh century.²²² From these sources, Brigid has been interpreted

²¹¹ Cogitosus, 'Life Of Saint Brigid The Virgin', 1, p. 63. See also Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae', 1.1-6.3, pp. 14-15.

²¹² Kissane, *Saint Brigid Of Kildare*, p. 104. For the Laigin, also see Callan, *Sacred Sisters*, p. 88. For the 'Fotharta Laigen' being near Kildare, see John Ryan, 'The Early History Of Leinster', *The Past: The Organ Of The Uí Cinsealaigh Historical Society*, 4 (1948), 13-37 (p. 18) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25519826>> [accessed 10th June 2024].

²¹³ Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae', 2.1-17.7, pp. 14-17.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 2.1-11.8, pp. 14-16..

²¹⁵ Callan, *Sacred Sisters*, pp. 92-93

²¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 94-95. For age of betrothal, see McCarthy, 'Topographical Characteristics Of The Vita Prima And Vita Cogitosi Sanctae Brigitae', p. 249.

²¹⁷ Callan, *Sacred Sisters*, pp. 95-97. For chronology and topography, see McCarthy, 'Topographical Characteristics Of The Vita Prima And Vita Cogitosi Sanctae Brigitae', p. 248.

²¹⁸ Kissane, *Saint Brigid Of Kildare*, pp. 104-105.

²¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 104-105.

²²⁰ Callan, *Sacred Sisters*, p. 87.

²²¹ Cormac, King of Cashel, *Sanas Chormaic*, trans. by John O'Donovan and ed. by Whitley Stokes (Ireland: Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society, 1868), pp. 23 and 148.

²²² 'Brigid, the poetess, daughter of the Dagda'; 'Brigit the female sage, or woman of wisdom, i.e. Brigit the goddess'; 'sisters were Brigit the female physician [woman of leechcraft,] Brigit the female smith [woman of smithwork]'; and 'whose names with all Irishmen a goddess was called Brigit' in Cormac, *Sanas Chormaic*, p. 23. For 'Brig, the daughter of the Dagda', 'Brig came and keened for her son'; and 'Bríg who invented a whistle for signalling at night', see 'Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle Of Mag Tuired', trans. by Elizabeth A. Gray, *Corpus Of Electronic Texts*, (2021) <<https://celt.ucc.ie/published/T300010.html>> [accessed 9th April 2024]. For 'Brigid the poetess, daughter of The Dagda'; 'Fea and Femen ... two oxen'; 'Triath, king of the swine'; and 'Cirb,

as a triple goddess of poetry, healing and smithcraft who is associated with the invention of keening and whistling, and who is in possession of two famous cows, a boar and a ram. It is possible that many pagan sites dedicated to the goddess became those named for the saint and that the widespread cult of Brigid may have 'benefited from that of the Goddess with whom she shares similarities beyond a name, such as an association with healing, fire, fertility, poetry, and provision'.²²³ What is certain is that Brigid in this modern age is a figure of inspiration. Curtayne, writing as early as the 1930s, refers to Brigid as a 'peerless exemplar of Celtic feminine energy and power', commenting that she 'can still lead womankind' and uses stirring words like 'self-emancipation' and 'modern feminists'.²²⁴ It seems that Brigid's longevity is down to her accessibility, creativity, compassion, and resourcefulness.²²⁵

king of the wethers', see *Lebor Gabála Éirenn: The Book Of The Taking Of Ireland*, IV, ed. and trans. by R. A. Stewart MacAlister (Dublin: The Irish Texts Society, 1941) p. 133. See also Dorothy Bray, 'Brigit (Goddess)', *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. by John T. Koch (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006), p.216. For Mythological Cycle, see Dan Wiley, 'Mythological Cycle', *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. by John T. Koch (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006), pp. 1326-1328, (pp. 1326-1327).

²²³ Callan, *Sacred Sisters*, p. 89

²²⁴ Curtayne, 'The Rediscovery Of Saint Brigid', p. 414 -415.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

Appendix E – Images



Fig. 1 - Brigid's Shrine, Faughart: At the far end with the stream flowing on the left, lie the first older station stones; on the bank of Brigid's Stream some of the modern stations are visible; to the right on a higher ground stands the shrine built in 1934; and at the centre is the grotto.²²⁶



Fig. 2 – The line of Brigid's Stream, at the lower part of the site at Faughart, just visible running from right to left near to the Hoof Stone, then flowing under the path and turning to flow behind the Knee Stone, to the left of the path. The white rimmed circular indentation of the Head Stone is just visible in the hedge to the left of the photograph.²²⁷

²²⁶ Gareth Wray, 'St. Brigid's Shrine, Faughart, Louth', *Louth: Land Of Legends* (2017) <<https://www.visitlouth.ie/explore-and-do/explore-louth/sacred-sites-louth/st-brigids-shrine.html>> [accessed 25th April 2024].

²²⁷ Wyldewood, *Photographs*, 2017.



Fig. 3 – The Round Tower in the cathedral grounds, Kildare Town.²²⁸

²²⁸ Wyldewood, *Photographs*, 2017.



Fig. 4 – The rectangular structure marking the site of the Firehouse in the cathedral grounds, Kildare Town.²²⁹



Fig. 5 – Upon the edge of the mound, on which medieval and early modern pilgrims used to pray, stands the triple stone arches, evocative of church windows, and the bronze statue of Brigid beside the stream.²³⁰

²²⁹ Wyldewood, *Photographs*, 2017.

²³⁰ Wyldewood, *Photographs*, 2017.



Fig. 6 – Stained-glass window by Harry Clarke in Saint Mary’s Catholic Church, Knockbridge (Chnoic Bhride). Brigid is on the right holding her distinctive cross.²³¹



Fig. 7 – The roofed well like structure and apparent well cover outside the Church of St. Brigid Grangegeeth.²³²

²³¹ Wyldewood, *Photographs*, 2023.

²³² Google Maps, ‘Google Street View: Church Of Saint Brigid Grangegeeth’, *Google Maps* (2024) <<https://maps.app.goo.gl/Un5J5pdjAgouJSiw8>> [accessed 10th June 2024].



Fig. 8 – Brigid's Way pilgrims visiting Father Moore's Well, (previously dedicated to Brigid) in Rathbride.²³³

²³³ Brigid's Way, *Brigid's Way Celtic Pilgrimage* [Instagram], <<https://www.instagram.com/p/C8CofweM0G0/>> 10th June 2024 [accessed 10th June 2023].

Appendix F – Maps



Fig. 1 – Approximate route of Brigid's Way created using Google Maps' best plotted walking route for each leg of the journey. The actual route for Brigid's Way is longer than this estimation.²³⁴

²³⁴ Google Maps, 'Hill Of Faughart To St. Brigid's Cathedral Kildare Town', *Google Maps*, 2024.

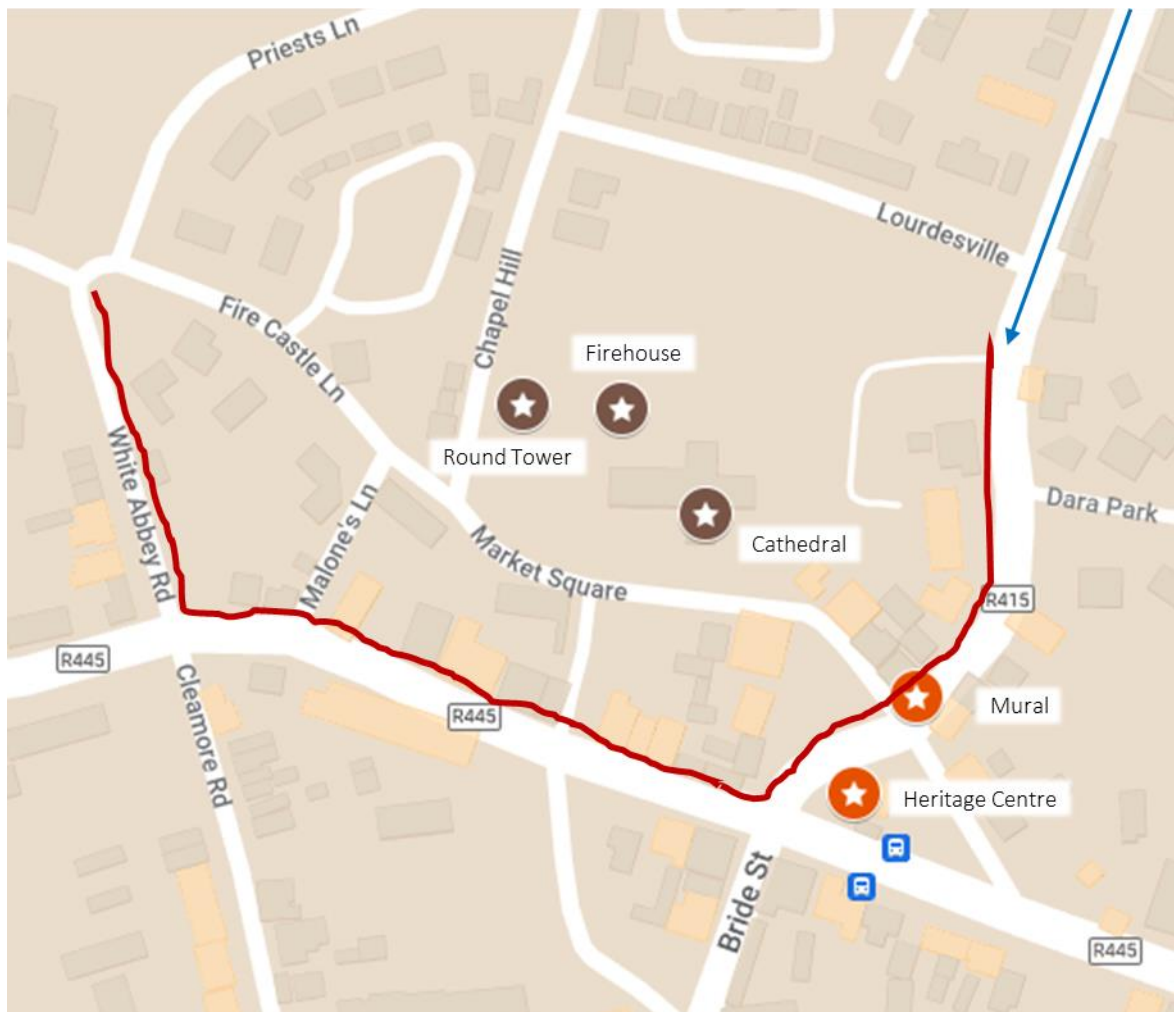


Fig. 2 – Map of Kildare Town centre showing the approximate line (in red) of the secondary outer enclosure constructed after the eighth century, along with features visible today within in the cathedral walls and in the town. The blue arrow indicates the direction of arrival for pilgrims of Brigid's Way.²³⁵

²³⁵ Google Maps, 'Kildare With Sites, *Google My Maps* (2024)
 <<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1nIWZbNBZAF6x-idlu1UllwX9Ud2aZYM&usp=sharing>> [created and accessed 7th May 2024].

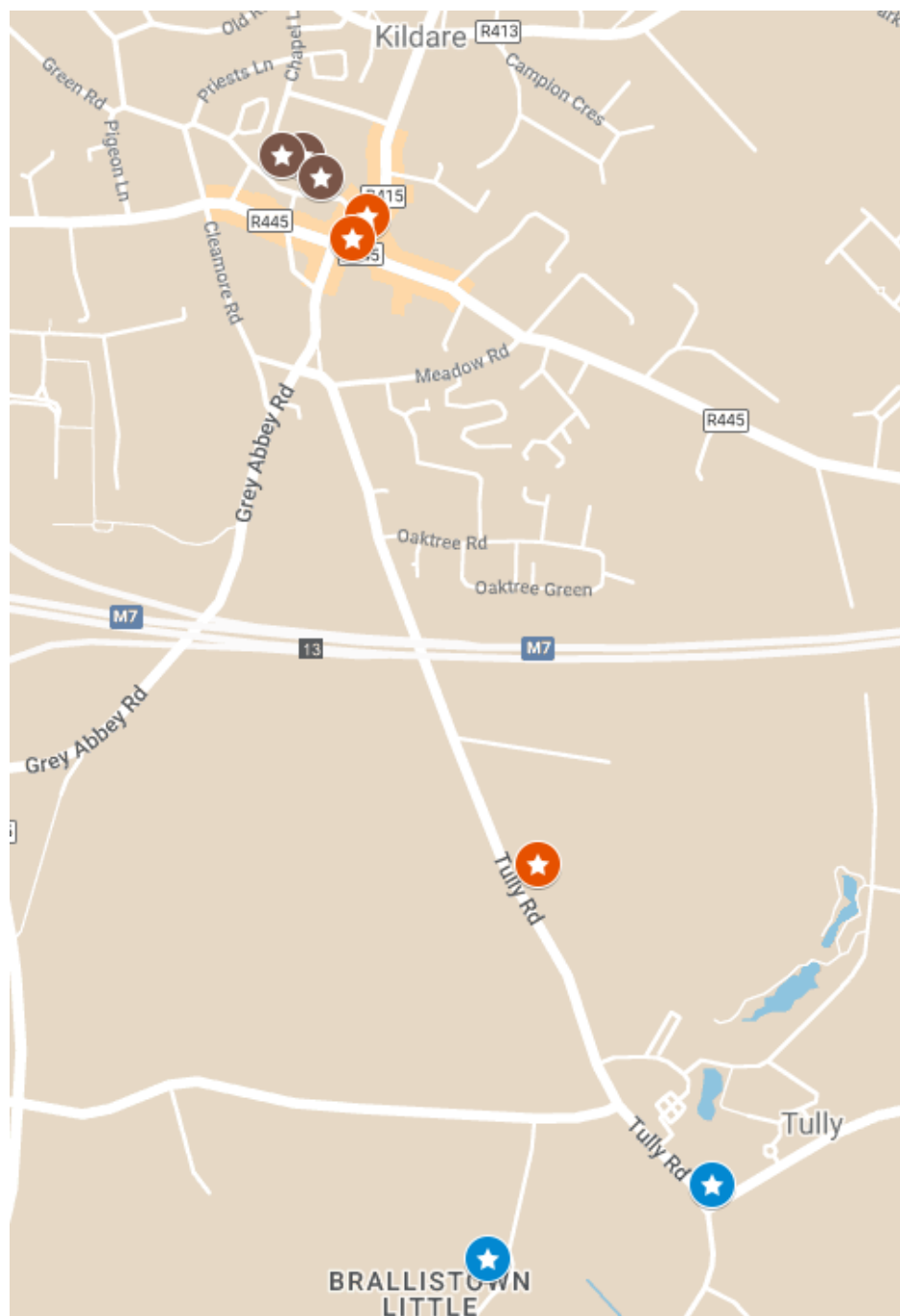


Fig. 3 – Map of Kildare Town with the Cathedral, Round Tower and Fire House marked in brown; the Kildare Heritage Centre and Tourist Office, mural of Brigid, and Solas Bhríde Centre and Hermitages marked in orange; and Brigid's Garden Well and Brigid's Wayside Well marked in blue.²³⁶

²³⁶ Google Maps, 'Kildare With Sites', *Google My Maps*, 2024.

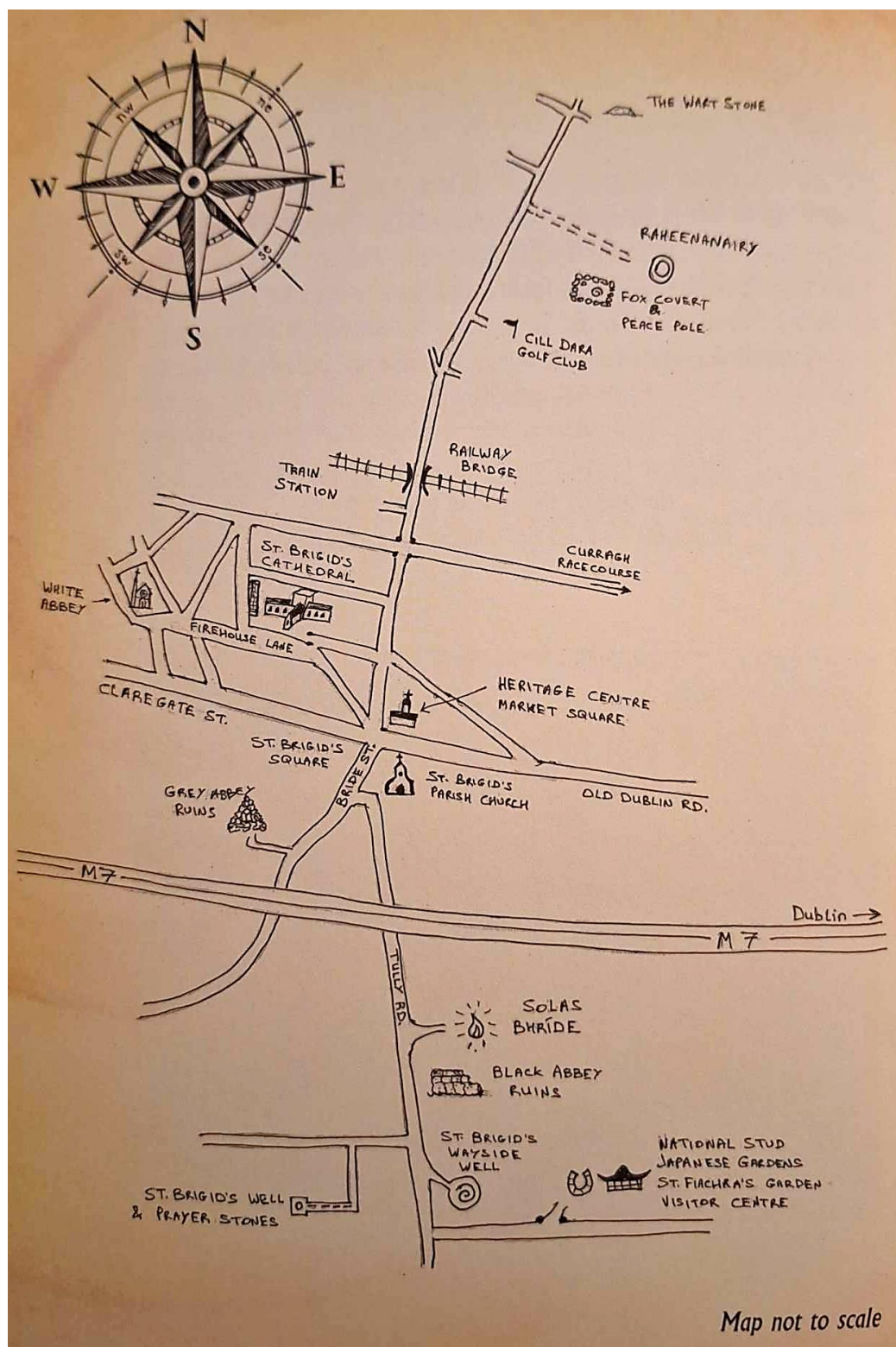


Fig. 4 – Map (not to scale) showing various Brigid-related sites in Kildare Town, including St Brigid's Parish Church, the Solas Bhríde Centre and Hermitages, the two St Brigid wells, and the Wart Stone or Rathbride.²³⁷

²³⁷ Minehan, *Rekindling The Flame*, p. 76.

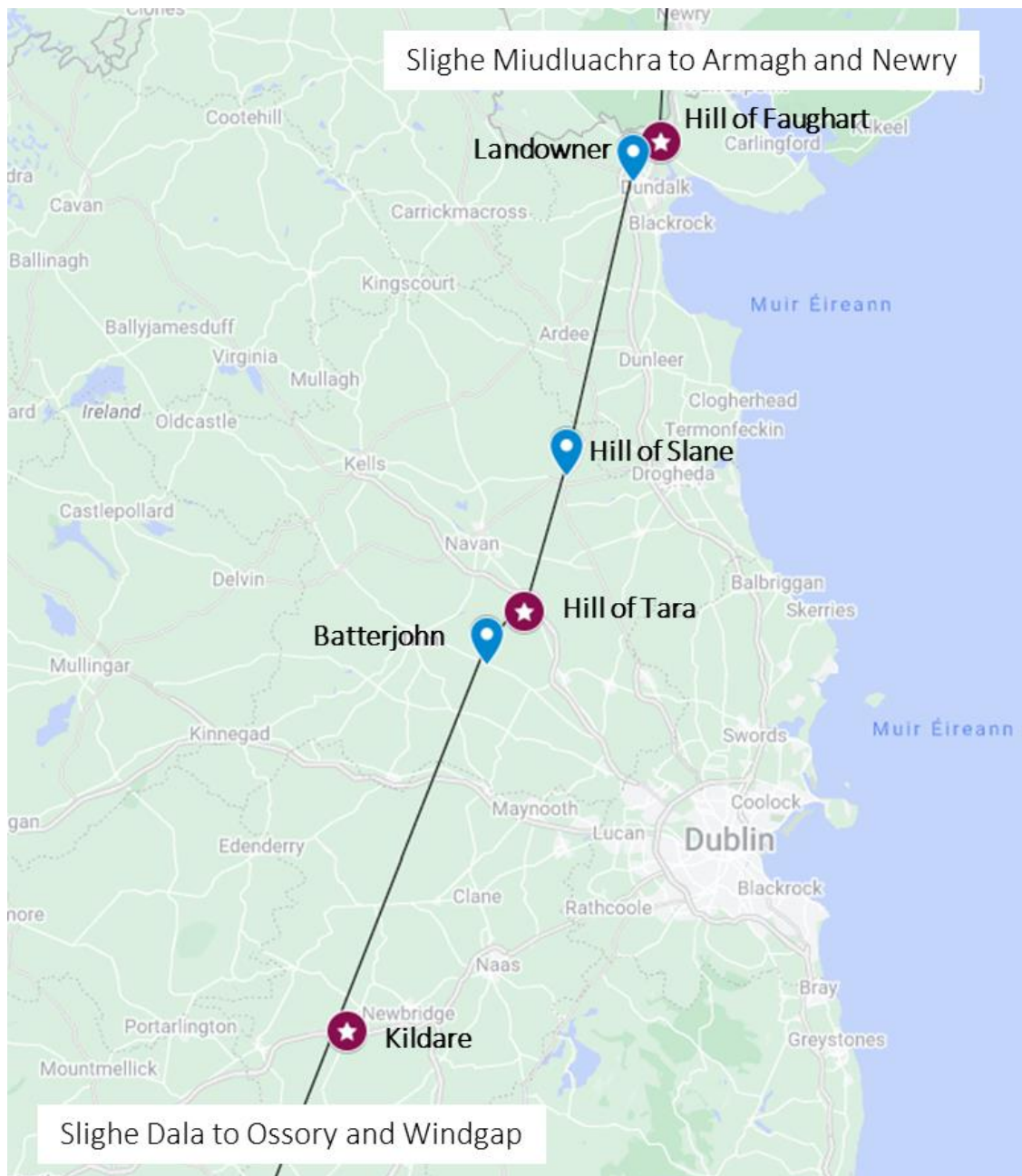


Fig. 5 – The approximate routes and directions of the Slighe Miudluachra and Slighe Dala from Tara. The northern road, the Slighe Miudluachra ran from Tara to Slane and up via that Moyry Gpa near the Hill of Faughart. The south-westerly path of the Slighe Dala ran from Tara to Batterjohn to Kildare and on to Ossory and Windgap via to Kildare.²³⁸

²³⁸ Google Maps, 'Slighe - Faughart to Kildare', *Google My Maps* (2024) https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=15R6n5_yZgO2mP-Jef8s2xEUzzlHV-no&usp=sharing [created and accessed 14th May 2024]. For the Slighe Miudluachra, see P. W. Joyce, 'A Smaller Social History Of Ireland'. For the Slighe Dala, see Patrick W. Joyce, 'On Changes And Corruptions In Irish Topographical Names', p. 227.

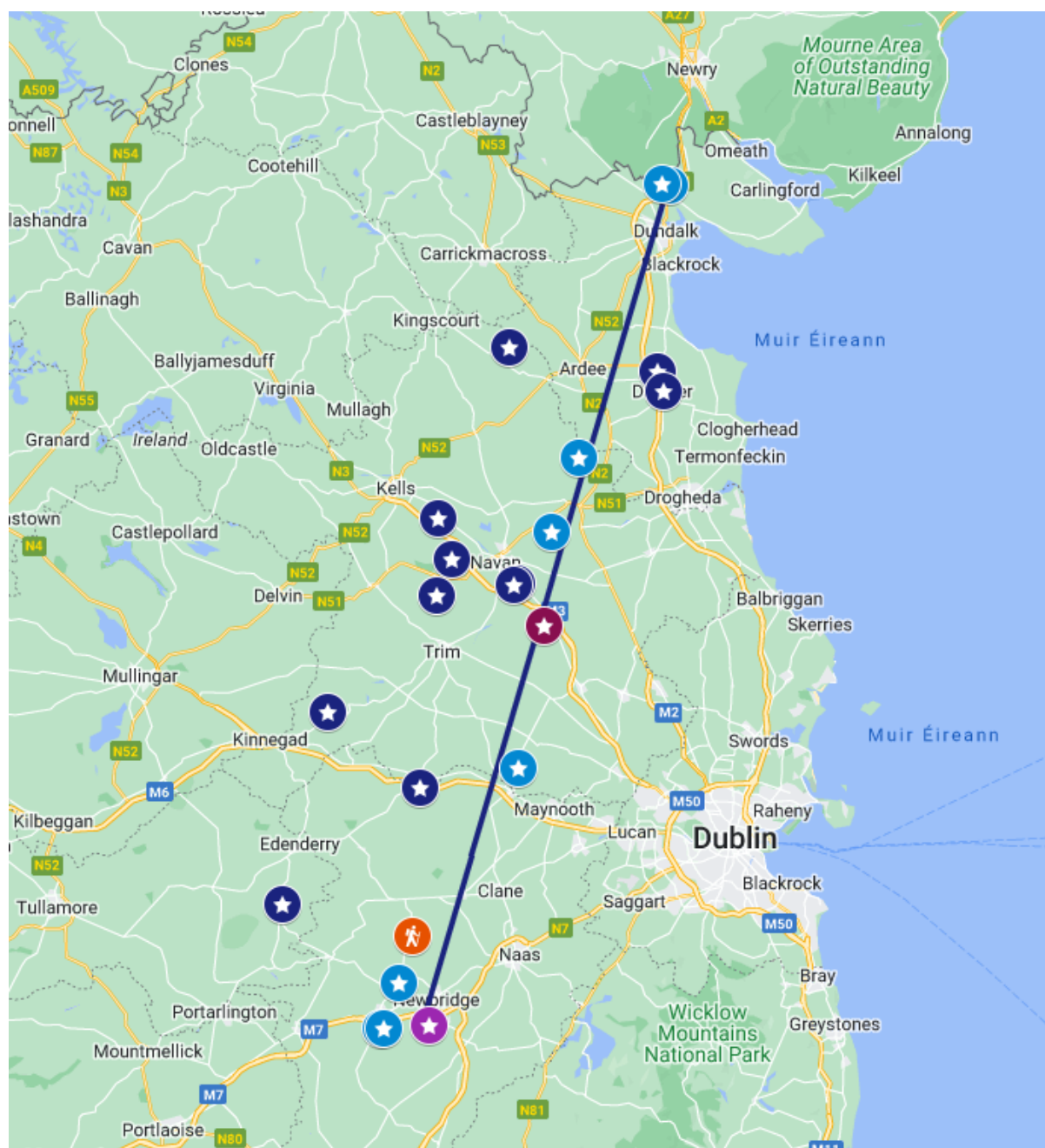


Fig. 6 – Sites of previously recorded wells and wells in current use dedicated to Brigid between Faughart and Kildare, (Faughart and Kildare wells are slightly hidden, one behind the other). The bright blue markers indicate the eight Brigid wells along Brigid's Way, including Father Moore's Well. The dark blue markers indicate other Brigid wells in the area. The dark red marker indicates the well at the Hill of Tara on the Brigid's Way route. The orange marker indicates the position of St Bridget's Walk at Allen. The purple marker indicates The Curragh. The line from Faughart to the Curragh of Brigid in Kildare represents the Cygnus alignment spoken of by Founder 1.²³⁹

²³⁹ Google Maps, 'St Brigid Wells - Faughart To Kildare', *Google My Maps* (2024)
 <<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1QRwFfhc7mFjBYabahIBNmNkW2jGxZBA&usp=sharing>>
 [accessed 11th June 2024].



Fig. 7 – Map from Brigid's Way website showing the Cygnus alignment, the Hill of Faughart, Hill of Slane, Hill of Tara, the Curragh, and Kildare Town, on which Brigid's Way is based.²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Brigid's Way, *Brigid's Way*, 2022.



Fig. 8 - Day Eight of Brigid's Way proceeds from Robertstown to Milltown via the Grand Canal and the Milltown Feeder Canal (canals shown in blue). Notice the position of Kilmeague. The red arrow points to the location of one end of 'St Bridget's Walk' as it leaves the road between Kilmeague and Milltown opposite Allen Cemetery. The orange arrow indicates the approximate location of the Hill of Allen situated between the Milltown Feeder Canal and the road. Kilcock is top right of the map and Kildare towards the bottom.²⁴¹

²⁴¹ Kildare County Council, *Tow Path Trails County Kildare Map*, (2022), p. 1
<https://kildarecoco.ie/kildaresp/Publications/Resources/Tow%20Path%20Trails%20%20County%20Kildare%20Map.pdf> [accessed 10th May 2024].

Appendix G – Interview With Landowner And Guide

Before the interview Landowner and Guide were given the following questions for their consideration:

- Landowner - Can you tell me approximately how long you have lived in the area and on this estate?
- Guide - Could you briefly describe the length of time you have been connected to the local area and the L*****y estate, and the depth of your knowledge about the area?
- Landowner - Was there any twentieth century pilgrim practice in Dundalk and/or Faughart dedicated to Brigid prior to the founding of the Brigid of Faughart Festival, do you know?
- Landowner - When the Brigid of Faughart Festival was founded in 2008 by Founder 3 and others, did the annual February pilgrimage to the Faughart Shrine start at your home then from the outset, or did that come later?
- Landowner - When did you begin to think that an earlier pilgrim path in Brigid's name had gone near or over L*****y land?
- Landowner - I'm led to believe that Harold O'Sullivan talked to you about this. Are you able to say more about when he talked to you about it and what his findings or opinion about a Brigid Pilgrim path were? Did he think that a pilgrim route was local to Faughart and Dundalk, or more extensive than that?
- Landowner - I heard there was a piece of paper or an article that Harold gave you with some of his findings on. Do you have, or have you seen, any evidence of an older pilgrim path through the land here L*****y?
- Guide - On the Pilgrimage you mentioned that you believe one of the ancient Royal Roads from Tara, Slighe Miudluachra went through what is now the L*****y estate. Can you explain a little more about that and share any evidence you feel supports that?
- Guide - What leads you to believe that the Brigid's Way pilgrimage should go through the L*****y estate?
- Landowner - Can you tell me about the Brigid stream on your land? What leads you to believe it has previous associations with Brigid?
- Guide – Can you add any historical information about the stream that may be relevant to Brigid's Way?
- Landowner - Can give an insight into your experience of guiding the pilgrims across the L*****y estate on the final stretch of the Day One route, Faughart to Dundalk?
- Guide - What do you think pilgrims gain from pilgrims gain from the overall experience of Brigid's Way?
- Landowner - What does having Brigid's Way connected to your land now and meeting pilgrims mean to you?
- Landowner - What do you think Pilgrim's gain from walking Brigid's Way?

Transcript of Interview on 4th Interview– March 2024

HW

Landowner, can you tell me approximately how long have you lived in the area and on this estate, on the L*****y lands?

L

Well, I've been here since October 2003. 2000. Sorry, I'm sorry, 1973, but the family have been here since the 15th century.

HW

OK, there's a long old history there. Thanks.

L

A long history, yes, of the C** Family here.

HW

OK. Thank you. And Pádraig, can you kind of roughly tell me the length of time that you've been connected to the local area there?

G

All my lifetime for forty, almost forty-six years. So, it's coming very close to it. But I grew up, would you believe in a housing estate called C**'s Domain, which was the L*****y estate.

HW

Okay

G

And to this day, it still has the C**'s name with it. You know, so it's literally as the crow flies three hundred metres, maybe from Landowner's.

L

It's part of the farm. It was all part of the farm at the time.

G

Yeah.

HW

And can you speak a little bit of your depth of knowledge of the actual land that we're talking about sort of like how much you've explored it and stuff?

G

Yeah, it's very strange because like we, we grew up in here, in Dundalk, so it, but went to the local school, the Redeemer Boy School, and we three amazing teachers there. Frank Muller. Sorry, Fred. Short, Patsy Murphy and Jimmy Johnson. And they taught us all about mythology and folklore of the area. And the amazing thing was the things that you're reading about in stories you could actually go and visit, you know, so the Fort Dún Dealgan, which is Cú Chulainn's home place, it's only maybe a kilometre is from my own house. So, growing up as a child, we spent our time speaking about mythology, folklore, or everything in the area and as I was saying we and it's strange, we were living on the edge of town, so it was one of the largest social housing estates in the country that was built back in 1970s. But the thing about it was you were right, in the countryside, I could literally go out my back door. And you're straight into the countryside and there's a standing stone in the field just behind us. So, we grew up with it, and it just had this magical property that was called this. We're always amazed by it playing around it, you know. And we got to verify it only five years ago. You know, so locally you're always told that they're like a scratching stones for cattle. Yeah. No. But I knew there was more to it than that. And we got to verify, which was just spectacular. One of many in the area have only recently been verified. You know, so it just shows you it. And just shows you in the area that there's still so much to be found. You know, just blessed to have known ...

L

I call this area an area of hidden heritage really because we there's so much that we know. But how much else is there that we don't know that has to have yet to be discovered going through the ages. Way back from Bridget's time right through, you know, up to the present day. I mean, it was only just recently that Guide discovered, you know, up the Deer Park, you know, spiral was accidentally come across, if you like.

G

The double spiral [*they refer to recently discovered and now verified Neolithic rock art]

L

So, what else is there, in our, you know, hidden heritage, I call it.

G

As I was saying, like I would have my back door and we were into the countryside and I've known this farm all my life, you know? So very, very blessed. It's strange to be growing up in a kind of council housing estate, yet out the back you had mythology and all these figures from Bridget and King William and Cú Chulainn and you know as I was saying, you could go and visit these sites. You know everything that you could read the book was laid out in front of you on the doorstep, you know, just magical.

HW

Thank you. So, Landowner, what I'd love to know is, to your knowledge, was there any 20th century, so the kind of pilgrim practice in Dundalk or Faughart dedicated to Brigid prior to the founding of the Brigid of Faughart Festival. And do you know, do you know sort of like looking back into your kind of

early life and the early days of you being here, do you remember any? Can you describe what you what that pilgrimage looked like?

L

Yes. Oh yes. Well, well, I can tell you I'm, that I'm, funny enough talking about Bridget. I actually was born in Kildare. As you know, in Kildare is where Bridget founded her monastery and so I came back up. Bridget came from Dundalk to Kildare and I've gone coming out from, came from Kildare up to Dundalk. So, I retraced the steps, if you like, and quite I'd say it was one day in 1973, probably. I don't know when the winter of 73, I got it was a knock on the door and this very gruff man said I'm here, he said to inspect your monuments and to make sure that there is no disturbance. And I hear you're a new wife and I hope everything will be all right here, and all the sacred artefacts would be left intact. So, I was sort of taken aback. So, he said, I said, well, I'll walk up with you anyway, because I didn't really know what he was talking about. So, he walked me up the land and we walked straight down to the same, straight up the cross up Primrose Lane and down through the Deer Park and down to Saint Bridget's stream. And all the while, he was talking, talking about. He spoke about, pointed across to Cú Chulainn's grave. He walked, we walked along to, he pointed to the left, to the right, then to where King William gathered his troops for the Battle of the Boyne. And then we passed the mass rock, where, where Oliver, St Oliver, St. Oliver Plunkett had his, said mass, secret masses, and down to Saint Bridget's stream. And I was pretty gobsmacked at this stage, and he explained how the waters of the streams and St Bridget's stream were, had healing qualities. And that's how the Saint Bridget refreshed herself there on her journey down to Kildare, and herself and her horse and then also she. They then came along, we had Cú Chulainn and he refreshed himself and his troops before they went into battle. And then likewise we had King William, he likewise, they refreshed themselves on the healing waters of Saint Bridget's stream and springs on their way to the battle of the Boyne with King. And then after battle also, they came back and camped here, before they went back to their various regiments. The poor, what was left of the army, and they healed themselves on these uh healing waters after the Battle of the Boyne. And so, I asked at this stage, years later, this man was Doctor Harold O'Sullivan, who was the local historian and wrote wonderful books on history and mythology. This area and he afterwards, many years later, when I had small children and that I said, 'Oh Harry, sure would you be good enough to write a children's book about all the findings on this area' and he was most indignant to me. And he said no, no, he said, historians don't really produce what other historians have written. And he said all of that is in the history books. And he said, you know, all of this can be researched and verified he said long before I came along. So that was my answer from Harry when I asked him would he consider writing a book just on our land here. So, it was speaking to him. He was he was very adamant anyway, that it should all be preserved and, you know, not for it, not to be destroyed in any way. So that was my initial introduction. So, when I came back into the house and I said to my husband, I said to you never told me this and you never told me that. And he said, well, I'll tell you the truth, there was, we've had troubles, as you know, in the, and it was during the troubled times, the troubles, so we couldn't really encourage visitors or, you know, leave ourselves open to vandalism or anything. So, he said, we sort of, we knew it, but we just didn't broadcast it. So that was, that's really where it sort of started and came from to me, who had just blew in from Kildare, if you like.

HW

So, Harold O'Sullivan, then he didn't mention particularly what books had mentioned the pieces about Brigid. You don't know where he'd found those?

L

And I can't answer you that, but we did have another historian staying here. A man called, just and I though, there a man called another, called Dr Daragh Smyth, who wrote this book. [Guide lifted up a book to show - 'Earthing the Myths: The Myths, Legends and Early History of Ireland' by Daragh Smyth].

HW

Okay. Thank you.

L

And in that book, now he spoke about many things, the myths of the area, and he said, which, I've lost myself, he knew about them, knew about Bridget and her association with this area. Now, Dr Daragh Smyth was from West Cork, which was furthest end of the country from here and he came up here especially. I didn't know the man at all. No more than I knew Dr Harold Sullivan when he knocked on the door, but they found their way here. They arrived in the doorstep with the interest of following the path of St Bridget and retracing her steps. So, Doctor O'Sullivan, Dr, He is also an expert on St Bridget, and he has a collection of the books, I believe. Now I can't give you the names. I'm sorry.

HW

Alright, I'll have a hunt, see if I can hunt some of that down. So, Landowner again, when the Bridgid of Faughart Festival was founded with Founder 3 and everything in 2008, did the annual February pilgrimage to the Faughart shrine start at your home then? Or did that kind of come later?

L

Sorry, I beg your pardon.

HW

So, when Founder 3 and the group of them, they founded the Brigid of Faughart Festival, and they did the pilgrimage from, you know, up to the shrine.

L

Yes. Oh, yes, yes.

HW

Did it go, from the get-go, start at your home? Did they start walking from your home or did that sort of that, that sort of tradition come a little bit later. When did that start?

L

No. No, strangely, strangely, it was Founder 3. I had a garden party with, I have, there's a Louth Ladies, a Louth Women's Network here, myself and some other farming women have this network. Little, small just, you know, locals. And we decided that we'd have stretch our hands across the border and we'd bring down the northern ladies. And give them some afternoon tea on the lawn here one bright summer's day, hopefully bright and no rain. And we were all preparing just to make you know, sandwiches and scones and you know, for to have a bit of music and you know, just a little sort of private garden party, if you like. So, in the meantime, there was a big cross-border initiative to have the, for the peace process and, so, I can't remember how many, what year it was. So, we had a gathering anyway already arranged and bus of these northern ladies to come down to join us for the afternoon. So, the peace process then approached us and said, well, they would like to be involved and they would like to supply a secretary for us. So, we're always glad to delegate jobs and our people offered to help. We always accepted with open arms. So, this wonderful girl was, she arranged that we would have him, instead of having just ourselves on the lawn here. She arranged a marquee. And then we arranged speakers, and we arranged musicians, and some food and refreshments, and walks up to see the sights. So, I said right, well, we better have an expert to speak about St Bridget. So that's where I contacted Founder 3. I already knew of Founder 2, because Founder 2 was from Kildare also, and, but Founder 3 was the local lady with the expertise and could speak about St Bridget. So that's where we started. With Founder 3. Then I asked Founder 3 to come up for lunch one day and I told her my plan and asked her would she be good enough to speak to the northern peace women and ourselves. And she said she would. And she said, actually she said, 'myself and Founder 2 are arranging a walk, to try, try walking the pilgrimage from Kildare, from Faughart to Kildare'. And I said, 'alright, well, that's fits in very well because Bridget walked through the land here'. And Founder 3 looked at me and she said, 'what, what?' And I said 'yes, and I'll bring you down and show you, if you like, down by the stream and how she, where she came in across, crossed over a little stream, and then walked down to her stream and then across out onto the Carrickmacross Road'. So, Founder 3 was dumbfounded, and she said 'Founder 2 and I have walked from Kildare. Right up to practically the edge of our land and we think, we got stuck. We didn't know where to go then. And we knew then of course, the road leading up to Faughart, but we were stuck. We hadn't the clue where to go'. So, I said, 'but sure it was through here that she went'. So, they were amazed. So, that filled in the piece of the jigsaw that they had missing. And we had, it turned out then we had wonderful day with the Northerners and the sun shone and was great. And at that meet, at that at the Garden Party, I also then needed an expert to speak about Cú Chulainn, so hence I contacted Daragh Smyth from West Cork and he spoke about Cú Chulainn and the connection with St Bridget's, and also at an expert then speaking about King William, a clergyman from the north of Ireland, and he, excuse me [cough], and he unfortunately has passed away since. Well, we had three experts, three wonderful historians speaking on those three topics. And it went down very, very well.

HW

Thank you for relaying that.

L

So that was that day.

HW

Thank you. That's kind of, that's a really good. Yeah, that's a really important piece.

L

No, you're more than welcome. [aside to Guide: Do you want to talk about the road?]

HW

So, you've talked a little bit about Harold O'Sullivan already, so I'm just going to skip that question. We've also covered that one. So, Guide, on the pilgrimage when we met, you mentioned that you believed one of the ancient royal roads from Tara. I sorry if I butchered the pronunciation, the Slighe Miudluachra.

G

Yes, yes.

HW

Is that right?

G

Yes.

HW

That the Slighe Miudluachra went through the L*****y Estate? Can you explain a little bit more about that and share any evidence that you feel supports that?

G

Oh yeah, sure. Originally, the estate here was part of the Roden Estate, and Lord Roden was a landowner here in Dundalk and the Mount Avenue Rd, as we would call it to this day, but it's more common name is 'the back of the wall'. But these walls were built back in the 1750s, roughly. But that was the ancient route way from the Hill of Tara to Armagh, and it was known as the Slighe Miudluachra and I was one of the five great ancient roads that spread across Ireland.

L

They all led to Tara.

G

Yeah, they led to Tara, and radiated out, and it's well known, and I can send you an information about this so I can Heidi. But Dr Harold O'Sullivan, amongst others confirmed, confirmed that this route was, and the reason why it ran this way was up to the Fort of Dún Dealgan, in which was the home of Cú Chulainn, so it would have been a royal site in ancient times. So, this road led up to the mount up there, you know and it's, it's amazing cause when you actually walk the road now, now it's being redeveloped at the moment, but it was wide enough, a *slige* was like the motorway of its day, and it

had to allow two royal chariots to be able to pass each other. And even though these two more recent roads were put in, it's virtually the width to allow that to happen. And then the other thing is we found a number of standing stones along the roadway, so we have, that we're supposed to be lost, but actually lead up to the castle. So, they're really like signposts. You know what I mean? And people used to follow these to go up to the mount. But there's a couple of articles online as well confirming it to be. Now, it's like everything in Ireland, you know. It's hard to determine it, but there's another local historian who is actually relation of Landowner's, Don Johnson, and he's done a lot of work and it's amazing because the Slighe Miudluachra is basically the route that the pilgrims follow so, yeah.

L

From ancient times, from Bridget's time, basically.

G

And Ulster back then was virtually impenetrable, and there was very few places you could actually get through. One of the most famous Gap of the North here, is the road that you actually walk to the to St Brigid shrine is the Slighe Miudluachra, also, and then it goes up over the hill. And goes in

L

Through the mountains.

G

Through mountains, you know. So, an extremely important road. And for it to run along this route.

HW

Is that the Moyry Pass there?

G

Yes, that's it. Exactly so.

L

Yeah, well done. And along that route you, particularly here in this area, we can speak just for our area. There's a lot of, what would you call it? Styles. Styles leading onto that road.

G

And it was offshoots off it also, you know. Some went off to different places, like this would have been the main road through here and up at actually Bridget's stream, St Bridget's stream on Landowner's land, there is a route on the far side of the of the stream, that was part of this road.

L

And yeah. Remains, yeah.

G

And there's an awful lot of Mass paths around here, which the ancient double hedges and people used to use these to walk, you know, to Mass in secret. So, some of the landowners were quite sympathetic where, you know, they turned a blind eye.

L

They had to have Mass.

G

But to build these pathways for people to go and practise their religion and.

L

Special things.

G

But the main routeway through Dundalk was the Slighe Miudluachra, so it was.

L

Very famous. Very famous. And as I was saying, went up to the Fort of Dún Dealgan, which is probably only half a kilometre from Landowner's fields, you know, so very, very, very special place here in Dundalk.

HW

Thank you. So is the thinking then that the Brigid route is just slightly augmented away from the main route. Or is it?

G

Yes.

HW

Do you think?

G

It's hard to tell because we know down to Bridget's stream we have the pathway there, and that pathway would have led over to Dún Binne [Dunbin] over by Knockbridge, and that was one of the roadways to take you down towards Knockbridge, and then you'll go to Ardee, and then Slane, you know, and these ancient routeways, and you it's funny we were doing a bit research at the moment and on the old ordinance survey maps, it does show some of these footpaths, so it does, route way and I can send you on links to that also, so I can.

L

Well Dr Harold O'Sullivan and he was quite he was, he was quite adamant, actually that that went right down by the stream.

G

And the other thing that we didn't mention was the pond here in the ...[?] field and St Bridget was meant to have blessed it also, and that's just here beside the farmyard.

L

Well, well, the history books say, according to Dr Harold O'Sullivan, he said all this the streams, the stream and the springs of L*****y were blessed by Bridget and have healing qualities so.

G

And the other thing that we didn't mention was, that when this housing estate close to here was being built, being built, two schools, or three schools, were created. Redeemer Boys' School and Girls' School, but we also have St Bridget's special needs school, which is actually on the highest point of the estate.

L

The highest point to that part.

G

So, it just shows you the connection of Bridget to this land as well. And I remember speaking to a teacher before and said one of the reasons was because she was the local saint and goddess for here was that her association with the land here you know.

L

So, they named the school after.

HW

Interesting that it's the highest point as well.

L

Yeah, yeah.

HW

Let me just have a quick catch up on where I'm at. So, I suppose we've kind of covered what leads you to believe that the Brigid's Way as it currently stands, as in the reimagining, the reinterpretation, the rediscovery of Brigid's Way now, so you've kind of covered why you think it should go through the estate, that you believe that it's sitting on something older.

G

Well, well, the other thing about it, Heidi, is that we've the King William Way, which follows the same route. And that has been verified and I'll send you an information about that also.

HW

Please do.

G

But it just shows you that these roadways have been used since ancient times. Do you know what I mean? And you know the Battle of the Boyne was in the 1600s, you know, but it shows you that we can trace back two millennia. You know, like Slighe Miudluachra road is at least two thousand years old you know, and it went out to Faughart, so it shows you how important the routeways all around the area are.

HW

Just on the Slighe Miudluachra, because I've been trying to look up online and try and find actually where it went. I mean my original understanding was that it went from Tara, in a sort of vaguely sort of straightish direction up towards Dundalk and Faughart. And then on up to sort of, you know.

G

Yeah.

HW

Up to the coast, through the gap and right up to the coast. But I've seen other interpretations where it goes sort of more Dublin and then up around the coast. But that's not my understanding. If you're understanding that, it's pretty much.

G

Like when, when you're at Tara itself, it's the road that's facing the Mulligan shop. Is it Mulligan's?

L

I forget the name of the shop now.

G

Yeah, the route runs directly in front is the Slighe Miudluachra and it runs down there and it kind of went over towards Slane and.

L

You can see quite clearly on a fine day from Tara, you can sort of look down on it.

G

And the road is still being used to this day.

L

Natural contour of the of the land.

G

And the reason why he went further north was these roads connected all the royal sites, you know, so it it left Dundalk here and went towards Armagh. What do you call it? Armagh. Yeah, Emain Macha, you know, which was the royal site for Ulster, so it was, and there's great connections between Cú Chulainn[?]

HW

Faughart was so important and so was Slane, obviously it went through these two.

G

Actually. Of course, massively. Yeah. And then Faughart like if, it's nearly like if you control Faughart yeah, you controlled one of the natural, only natural route ways because a name for the local area here was the 'fews', F.E.W.S, and it basically means forest.

L

That's true.

G

So, Ulster was virtually impenetrable, you know, was forest, bogs.

L

And this was possible.

G

For yeah. Yeah, that's true. And don't forget we'd wolves and we'd bears, we'd everything, you know what. I mean so. It's amazing. When you walk across Landowner's land and we've different clumps of trees and Cú Chulainn's grave and all these places, but like this would have been thick forest, you know.

L

There's still stumps, stumps of massive, big trees, you know, huge, big oak trees still there. You know what you can see, you can imagine it was covered in wood, dense forest at the time you know. So that was the remains are still there to be seen, really.

G

And there's and off shoot, it'll come to me now. I'll send you a link about it, but there's a great historian and an archaeologist, Cormac McSparron, with University of Ulster, actually could be Queens, and he done a lot of work on the Dorsey, so I don't know if you've heard of it. But the Dorsey basically comes to the Irish for Doris, and so they were, Dor, Dorsey of Ulster. Yeah, you know, and it's connected with Slighe Miudluachra, but I can send you all this.

HW

I'd appreciate that. And like anything that you can send me, sort of based on all of this and for me to filter through that would be absolutely fantastic. Sometimes, it's really good to see maps and visuals as well. I mean, when you're trying to piece it together in your head.

G

Oh yeah, like.

L

It links it all together then for you. Yeah.

HW

That would be great. So, just generally either or both of you. Obviously, you both have a input into the pilgrimage and Guide you lead them across the land, and Landowner, you welcome pilgrims, what do you think, what's your experience of the pilgrimage from that perspective, and what do you think pilgrims gain from the pilgrimage in general, what do you think that they're getting out of it?

L

Well, I think it's, I think it's a very personal thing, Heidi, to tell you the truth. And we, we all have, we're all different, we all have our own personal circumstances, worries, cares, ambitions, you know, hopes, dreams. And I think it sort of encompasses all of that really that you know, we gather here once a year, sometimes twice a year and we go on our own pilgrimage. All right, we might be in a group, but it's our own personal feelings what we get out of it really. It's a challenge. Pilgrimage isn't meant to be a luxury holiday, so we're really encompassing what pilgrims have done for centuries. You know, they've gone from holy places, they've visited wells, they've, you know, followed the path of ancient saints. They've needed time to themselves to work out what's the best way to solve their own problems or, you know, worries, cares and usually they start off, perhaps a bit apprehensive, but at the end of the journey, at the end of the nine days, or even if it's only one day pilgrimage on a feast day, you know, it's amazing. I notice the people how, how to put it, how refreshed they are. They seem to feel that they've achieved something and they're great for doing it and they have, for whatever reasons you know, it all seems to be personal, but they all have smiles in their faces, and they might have blisters on their feet, or, you know cuts or grazes or whatever, suffered a bit of hardship. Maybe the weather was bad, and they were cold, and you know, thirsty and you know, hungry. What happened in Bridget's time when her, when her nuns and you know her community, were sent out to heal the sick in different parts? You know, it wasn't a garden of roses for them. But that was, they survived and hopefully pleased God. The pilgrims will survive, carry on the tradition for

many, many years to come. And if we can play our part, Guide giving them the guide of the land and explaining a little bit about the heritage, etcetera, and I'm prepared to give them the little bit of hospitality and help whatever way I can, and so be it. And welcome wonderful pilgrims like yourself and P..., it all makes it worthwhile.

HW

Thank you. What about you, Guide? What's it feel like to be able to share some of the, to you know, connect the dots for the pilgrims, of the mythology, and you know what they can actually see in the landscape that you know? And what do you think they're gaining from that as well as? You being able to give that?

L

It's lovely because you've all different nationalities. You don't know anything about these people, you know? So, what you're trying to portray is what's on the land here and just take them. And what I love is we don't try and impose anything on anyone. It's what you want to take away from it yourself. You know, we can guide you and say such and such was here or that is there, or like we'll take you down to the stream and you can put your feet in it. I know myself, I had trouble with my foot and I went down there and I was [?] in. And when I came away from it, I've never felt so fresh. I was completely rejuvenated, you know. But I am, there's not really that much more I could that Landowner put in there. She put it so beautifully, because then it's lovely and I've made so many new friends from it, you know. And, everyone that comes along is a believer, I suppose. Do you know because they're searching for something? And I think that's true in life, we're all searching for something, you know, for different answers and stuff. Like when, they come here, like all I can do is to show them what's there, you know, and just try to explain it as best I can. But to be here on the farm at L*****y, because it's one of the last unspoilt across the country. I suppose the endeavours that you can have on the pilgrimage, you know, and there's just something very special, and because it's the opening day of the pilgrimage, you know, everyone's kind of tired and stuff, and especially last year. The pilgrims were there, and they were tired, and I was like, come on, let's keep going, you know? And it felt that strength and energy to go and look at the likes of the double spiral [neolithic rock art] you know, and everything amazed by it, you know. And then we come back here, and the kids are playing music, you know [referring to the local children playing harps for the pilgrims in Landowner's garden].

L

You brought them back and then you went to, showed them Cú Chulainn's grave and, you know, on the way around the farm.

G

Know. It's. Yeah.

L

They you showed them all the different landmarks that you like.

G

And I suppose it goes back to Bridget's times. Like Irish people love to talk, so, you know, tell stories. And we've always been that way. We're very hospitable. We'll take anyone. You know. You know, and if we, if people can go away with just a mention of anything from here, you know I'd like to just to remember that we're hospitable and I suppose Bridgets in our own way. You know what I mean as in.

L

Yeah. We, you know, we're very happy, we're honoured. I feel honoured to be able to give my time and energies, you know, for that little part of the year into St Bridget.

G

And I and I know personally when I go away from it, I feel good about myself. You know that you're just, you know, you might help somebody along or do you know what I mean? You open your eyes. Maybe just something different, you know or anything but, you're drained, but you're full of life, if that makes sense because.

L

The appreciation is all we need, really, that helps you know, makes you feel that it's worthwhile.

G

Oh yeah. And it's addictive because when you went to Slane, oh sorry to the Hill of Tara, we did also, we can't leave yet.

L

Yes, definitely.

G

And we had to go and visit just, you know, just to see how you were getting on and you know, just make sure you're all okay We're near like mothers with their children, you know.

L

And then in Kildare, too, when you arrived in Kildare, you know, oh, it was great to see you all and you've made the nine days you, you know, really it was special.

HW

Thank you.

L

They completed the journey.

HW

So in in light of all of that, what would it mean then for you and for Brigid's Way, do you think to get sort of official signage and recognition of the route, what would that mean?

G

Well, it would be fantastic.

L

I think it's great. It'd be great, but I've one little, teeny-weeny reserve. I really feel it should be sympathetically done. And, uh, I mean, one of the worries that the C** family has here, I mean, we always, anybody strangers that came were welcome, who wanted to come and walk the land always were. I don't think we ever refused anybody for any reason you know, if they were genuinely interested, but we also have Newgrange and it was made into a feel like a big tourist centre and there was a lot of concrete and tarmac and bright lights and neon signs, and this family here is very private. You know, they really didn't want to spoil the land. They wanted to keep us as natural. To keep it natural, basically, and you know, continue with farming, we're organic farmers and trying to keep it the land, the way it was always through the centuries, and you know, so long as there's a respect, I suppose that's the word I'm looking for and it's done in a sympathetic way. And it would be absolutely wonderful, because we, the story of Bridget, really should be worldwide and spelt out in this, you know, to everybody that everybody's welcome to come the Brigid path. The Brigid's Way is just unique. And you know, if it's if it's contained in that way, I think it would be perfect.

HW

Perfect. Thank you. Thank you. I'm going to end the recording now.

Appendix H – Pilgrim Questionnaires

Pilgrim Questionnaire

Ten questions were asked of nine pilgrims who walked Brigid's Way as part of group in July 2023. The group was led for the nine days by Brigid's Way volunteers. The pilgrims were made aware that their responses would be anonymised in the dissertation and the appendices. They were also informed that they could opt out all together or skip questions. Out of the nine, four pilgrims sent back a written response and one responded via Zoom. The questions asked are as follows:

1. What was your primary motivation for walking the route? (For example: dedication to St Brigid; dedication to pagan goddess Brigid; physical well-being; spiritual contemplation; connection with nature and the land; Ireland and its history; connecting with familial roots or ancestry; Celtic connection; an alternative holiday; or raising money for a cause)
2. What does pilgrimage mean to you and what makes a person a pilgrim?
3. What was your understanding of or connection to St Brigid before embarking on the pilgrimage?
4. Do you feel you understood why the route was taken from Faughart to Kildare, and did you gain that understanding whilst on the pilgrimage?
5. How important to you was it that historical information was given to you about the sites or wells you visited in relation to Brigid?
6. How important to you was it that legendary or traditional stories were given to you en route?
7. Did any physical, creative, or spiritual practices enhance your experience of the pilgrimage? And were those guided by the facilitators or self-guided practices?
8. What was your main personal gain or takeaway from the pilgrimage? (For example: mental, emotional, spiritual, social, or physical benefits)
9. Did your spiritual outlook and connection to, or thoughts about, St Brigid change during the pilgrimage?
10. How far did you travel to take part in the pilgrimage? (Just town or county, if in Ireland, and country for elsewhere will suffice.)

Pilgrim Responses

Pilgrim A

1. What was your primary motivation for walking the route?

OK, so my reasons for going on the pilgrimage were several fold. First, because I revere and hold dear, Brigid, primarily in her goddess form, but I'm interested in her saint form as well, and I was very much looking forward to visiting various places, wells, etc. sacred to Brigid. I was also interested and very much keen to connect with the land. In terms of, if I could, in terms of the Sidhe. Whilst I was walking the land, I didn't really get much of that connection. I didn't feel that very much. But then other thing it was a very absorbing experience. And the third was nature. To take in the natural environment I was walking through and that was very much a wonderful part of it for me. And of course visiting Ireland which is something I've wanted to do all my life.

2. What does pilgrimage mean to you and what makes a person a pilgrim?

Pilgrimage means to me having a particular focus for travelling through a landscape. And visiting relevant sites along the way. For me it primarily has a spiritual dimension, a way to connect deeply with the focus, in this case Brigid. A pilgrim is someone who is dedicated to that journey, and who will potentially undergo hardships and challenges to complete it.

3. What was your understanding of or connection to St Brigid before embarking on the pilgrimage?

Other than an intellectual understanding of Brigid as a Christian Saint I had little connection prior to the pilgrimage, being primarily connected in myself to the goddess.

4. Do you feel you understood why the route was taken from Faughart to Kildare, and did you gain that understanding whilst on the pilgrimage?

I had some idea for the reasons for the start and end point of the pilgrimage, but I gained a great deal more understanding once the pilgrimage was underway through places we visited and people who spoke to us concerning various aspects of Brigid in both her forms.

5. How important to you was it that historical information was given to you about the sites or wells you visited in relation to Brigid?

Very important. As an archaeologist such matters are foremost in my mind when I visit an ancient and/or sacred site.

6. How important to you was it that legendary or traditional stories were given to you en route?

Once again, very important. My interest in mythology and folklore is as deep seated as my interest in archaeology, and such information greatly aided my appreciation of the sites we visited.

7. Did any physical, creative, or spiritual practices enhance your experience of the pilgrimage? And were those guided by the facilitators or self-guided practices?

First of all being with others on the pilgrimage was deeply nourishing and the connections made became a very important aspect. Practices like the Forest Bathing at Dunsany Estate; connecting to nature at Donadea Forest Park; and the druidic ritual at Tara greatly enhanced my experience of the pilgrimage. Also, my own practice of being present in the walk, the sense of wellbeing I got from moving thorough the landscape is hard to put into words, but left a deep hitherto unexperienced impression on me.

8. What was your main personal gain or takeaway from the pilgrimage? (For example: mental, emotional, spiritual, social, or physical benefits)

The achievement of walking the complete route was a huge personal gain, also the discovery of many wonderful places. But the biggest gain I received was from staying at Dalgan Park Monastery, where I experienced a very real and tangible sense of peace, bliss and the numinous, which I've never experienced anywhere else, and I will never forget.

9. Did your spiritual outlook and connection to, or thoughts about, St Brigid change during the pilgrimage?

Yes, I became a lot more aware and connected to her Christian aspect. Though not a worshipper myself, I felt I gained some understanding of her importance to the Irish and their love for her. This is not something I've ever experienced in the UK for any saint or spiritual being.

10. How far did you travel to take part in the pilgrimage?

UK.

Pilgrim B

1. What was your primary motivation for walking the route?

My motivation combined my love of Brigid, both saint and goddess, as well as my physical well-being.

2. What does pilgrimage mean to you and what makes a person a pilgrim?

Pilgrimage means a spiritual, soul journey in community. As a pilgrim, I have set out on a spiritual journey with Brigid and my fellow pilgrims in hopes of being transformed. The process of walking the walk is as important as the destinations along the way.

3. What was your understanding of or connection to St Brigid before embarking on the pilgrimage?

St. Brigid has been part of my spiritual journey for more than 20 years. She was one of several Celtic Saints that I have become familiar with.

4. Do you feel you understood why the route was taken from Faughart to Kildare, and did you gain that understanding whilst on the pilgrimage?

The last time I went to Ireland in 2001, I was in both Faughart and Kildare. When I went on Brigid's Way in 2023, I had a great deal more spiritual experience and knowledge of Brigid and the other Celtic Saint. This time, walking the walk made experiencing Brigid in a much more embodied way. The depth of my spiritual experience as well as my knowledge of Brigid grew as we walked her path.

5. How important to you was it that historical information was given to you about the sites or wells you visited in relation to Brigid?

I loved being given the historical information about the sites and wells. Those details made it more intriguing.

6. How important to you was it that legendary or traditional stories were given to you en route?

I am grateful for all the legendary and traditional storytelling as they extended the meaning of the journey and the sites.

7. Did any physical, creative, or spiritual practices enhance your experience of the pilgrimage? And were those guided by the facilitators or self-guided practices?

The conversations with my fellow pilgrims and the guides really enhanced my experience. I found it easier to hear if I walked ahead of the guide. The practices and songs at the wells, the fire on Slane, the ritual with the woman druid at Tara and lighting the fire and the blessing in Kildare were milestones. There were so many others.

8. What was your main personal gain or takeaway from the pilgrimage?

I love being able to tell others about my pilgrimage. I feel more committed to working with Celtic Spirituality and extending my understanding of my Irish heritage.

9. Did your spiritual outlook and connection to, or thoughts about, St Brigid change during the pilgrimage?

My outlook and connection with St. Brigid have deepened and expanded. She is now one of my key spiritual guides and companions.

10. How far did you travel to take part in the pilgrimage?

Michigan, USA.

Pilgrim D

1. What was your primary motivation for walking the route?

I was interested in walking the land and making connection with the folklore of Ireland and I am interested in Celtic Spirituality so wanted a spiritual style walk. Like a retreat feel.

2. What does pilgrimage mean to you and what makes a person a pilgrim?

It doesn't mean that much to me to be honest. My understanding of it is a person who takes time away from normal life to take time alone to reflect and gain insight on their life and their place in the world.

3. What was your understanding of or connection to St Brigid before embarking on the pilgrimage?

I wasn't interested in the saint part at all. It was the goddess side I was interested in. I came at it through K****'s Moon Mna. If I thought it was a saint/religious focus I would not have chosen to do the walk.

4. Do you feel you understood why the route was taken from Faughart to Kildare, and did you gain that understanding whilst on the pilgrimage?

Yes, I did

5. How important to you was it that historical information was given to you about the sites or wells you visited in relation to Brigid?

This was really valuable from the perspective of how my ancestors connected with the land and the stories of the time from Celtic times through to the modern times from goddess to saint status.

6. How important to you was it that legendary or traditional stories were given to you en route?

Primary importance

7. Did any physical, creative, or spiritual practices enhance your experience of the pilgrimage? And were those guided by the facilitators or self-guided practices?

Yes, that was my reason for choosing the walk. The ceremony on the Hill of Tara, the fire ceremonies, making the crosses....I liked all of those elements

8. What was your main personal gain or takeaway from the pilgrimage?

Connection to the stories and folklore of Ireland and understanding

9. Did your spiritual outlook and connection to, or thoughts about, St Brigid change during the pilgrimage?

St. Brigid wasn't really a feature for me so was not connecting in with that element.

10. How far did you travel to take part in the pilgrimage?

Wicklow

Pilgrim E

1. What was your primary motivation for walking the route?

So it was interesting. I well, I'll get to this when you ask about Bridget. I didn't really know anything about Bridget. So my primary motivation was. To really walk on the land of my ancestors, I had never been to Ireland. I have Irish ancestry on my mother's side. And I've always felt connected to that part of myself, but I had never been able to experience it. And and it was interesting, even the way I heard about the pilgrimage was through M****, who? You know, who I've been working with as a shaman, which, you know, I've been doing. Shamanic work with her. And we had started to become friends and she mentioned that she really wanted to go on this pilgrimage and that she wanted to bring some people from the Bay Area along. And as soon as she told me about the pilgrimage. It was like one of those lightning bolt moments where I just knew I had to do it and it was interesting because I had planned to go to Ireland last summer for a different purpose with my large choir that I sing in. They do international trips every couple of years to music festivals and they had planned a trip to the Limerick. Music Festival that June and I had put down a deposit. And everything. But as soon as I heard about the walking pilgrimage, I just knew. No, this is what I'm meant to be doing. And I was already on a spiritual journey, as you know, a search for kind of my, the source of my yearnings, and trying to kind of understand more about how I fit into the larger picture of life and the universe and energy, and to me, the pilgrimage was this invitation to. Get to know the land of my ancestors and also deepen my own spiritual exploration. So that's what drew me to it.

2. So what does pilgrimage mean to you? And what makes a person a pilgrim, do you think?

So I think for me, pilgrimage is really. As much about the internal journey as the external journey. So there is this, you know, physical component of obviously the walking and the being in the elements and out in nature. But I feel like it's as much of, if not more, an internal journey. So to me, a Pilgrim is someone who is trying to either understand themselves more deeply through a kind of ritualistic experience or and or someone who is trying to connect to unseen world, the unexplainable. You know dimension of the world and reality, and whatever you want to call you know kind of that unseen or the divine or the magic that we can't always define for ourselves, but we know is there somewhere and we're looking to connect to that more and I think. Well, what's interesting is I know there are pilgrimages that people do solo, and then there are pilgrimages that are more group experiences like the one we had. So for me, I think. It was really a beautiful and enriching and useful container to be walking a pilgrimage in a group. It held me. I feel like I had, in some ways a deeper internal experience being a pilgrim within a group of other pilgrims than I would have had I done it on my own. So I don't know if that really answers the question, but yeah. Thank you. And you can ask follow up questions. If I'm not you. Know being clear.

3. What was your understanding of or connection to St Brigid before embarking on the pilgrimage?

I really had no connection to her. I. Really didn't know and still don't know a lot about, you know, Christian Saints or Catholic Saints. I and I didn't really know much about her as a goddess either, so, and I was definitely more drawn to doing the pilgrimage for the exploration of the goddess Brigid than the Saint Brigid, because I wasn't, I'm not a religious person. I wasn't raised religiously. For me, it was really interesting to learn about her as a Saint, but also for me it was so clear that the only reason she

was, you know, canonised was because she was a goddess and the Catholic Church was trying to draw her followers, you know, into the church. So, you know, I don't know how people who are Catholic look at her. If they consider the goddess part of her, or if they just consider her as this St that didn't have this whole history, you know beforehand. But yeah, so for me I really didn't know anything, but I was excited to learn about her and I liked that there was a, you know, a clear focus for the pilgrimage. And and it felt like it was going to be something that would help me connect more deeply to the journey.

4. Do you feel you understood why the route was taken from Faughart to Kildare and did you gain that understanding whilst you were on the pilgrimage?

Yes, I well, my understanding is that that was the route because that was her birthplace and then the place where she passed and founded her monastery at the end. I don't know if I was really clear on that. I guess I probably had some sense of that before I began the journey. But the meaning of the places, the starting and end points became much richer and more clear while we were walking and the actual route itself, and the reason that we stopped in different areas, you know, became more clear to me.

5. How important to you was it that historical information was given to you about the sites or wells you visited in relation to Brigid?

It was really important, I think. Because I was, I was walking the pilgrimage, as I said, to experience the land of my ancestors, which I really did, and it was really powerful experience for me, but also because I really did want to learn about her in both her incarnations. And because it was my first time in Ireland and I really hadn't done a lot of research ahead of time, I wasn't really aware of, you know, the historical significance of any of the places that we were going to be visiting on the route. And so it really helped me to. I mean, it helped to enrich the experience and it helped me to put it, I guess, all in context a bit more too. It just deepens the experience for me, for sure.

6. How important to you was it that legendary or traditional stories were given to you en route?

Well, that was interesting. I didn't necessarily expect that, but I really, really appreciated it. And yeah, it was amazing. Everything from P***'s, you know, epic poems and songs, to P***** did some storytelling, and you know, we got to hear about all these amazing legends that I think was this wonderful kind of cherry on the top of the experience for me. I think it also for me, it helped weave in the magic of the journey more just because I think, you know, hearing about some of the more concrete historical aspects was really interesting and some of the sights, but getting more of the stories and the legends just made me feel like I was stepping into history in a different way and really helped to, I don't know how to describe it, like it woke up the land for me in a different way, you know, and I felt like I could connect more to, you know. These are Arthurian legends or these the fairies and the fairy trees and all these things that we were kind of passing through or around it. Yeah, it just kind of brought it all to life for me.

7. Did any physical, creative or spiritual practises enhance your experience of the pilgrimage, and were those guided by the facilitators or self-guided practises?

Yes, yes. And they were both. So I really appreciated the ceremonies that we got to participate in. Those were really important for me. I think in terms of deepening my personal experience and my

personal sort of revelations that I was having throughout the journey. And also in terms of making the whole experience feel more sacred. So the things that were organised by the group or the organisers, you know, the shamanic fire ceremony that we had was, I thought, really powerful. And I definitely had certain realisations or epiphanies during that experience. And even things like the songs we learned along the way, you know the songs about the wells and fire and water, those things created this feeling of a deeper kind of ritualistic experience for me, that really, yeah, I think made the whole experience. You know, really unique and special and really made me feel held both in like in all ways like body, mind and spirit. So it wasn't just about a physical walking journey, you know, for me. And then my own practises, really the only thing it's funny. I had brought journals with me, multiple journals you know, thinking I would be writing every night about the day or my experiences or my realisations. But because we walked so much and we were all so exhausted, I didn't have any energy for that. So my only personal kind of ritual, that also helped to deepen the experience for me, was when I would choose to walk silently on the path you know, as opposed to socialising with the other pilgrims. And in those moments, I felt, you know, like this quieting, and I was able to have a more introspective connection to myself, but also to the land. And you know, to the generations upon generations of my ancestors who had lived on that land and to really feel my own connection to it in a way that I think. I could only experience just through my own individual walking practise walking meditation practise that makes sense.

8. What was your main personal gain or take away from the pilgrimage?

Well, there were several, but one of them was I think I I don't know if I've talked to you about this in the past, but I realised a few days into the pilgrimage that it was going to be really important for me to walk every step of the journey I could, and for me that was. And I wasn't really, it wasn't clear to me why that was so important, until, you know, I had gotten further in the journey and then I had this realisation one day that the journey was symbolic for me, not just of connecting to my roots and connecting to Brigid, the goddess and connecting to these legends and beautiful stories and the magic of Ireland, but also it was symbolic of me reaching a place in my own physical healing journey. That I couldn't have anticipated I would get to even a couple of years ago. And as you know, you know, I had a long journey with chronic illness and so that was one thing I didn't anticipate. Before coming to Ireland, was that the actual walking was going to be really significant for me and the fact that, you know, I was thankfully able to complete every step of the journey. Really I think helped me embody this, knowing that I had, you know, healed myself to a degree I hadn't thought possible and that I was no longer in this state of illness, that I had been in for so long. So that was really powerful for me, and something that I. Hadn't really anticipated. And I think the other thing was. Well, two things I guess. One is I did really end up feeling connected to Bridgid more of the goddess than the saint and it took a while, but there was a day when we visited one of her wells. I think it was the well in that beautiful grove, this man planted all of these little trees. Yeah. And dedicated it to, I think a grandchild who had passed, maybe. And there was this well. And I remember looking into the well with all of your beautiful faces reflected in the water kind of above me, and feeling this my first, and this was pretty far into the journey. This was probably at least a six or seven. I don't remember, and all of a sudden feeling, I guess, the essence of Brigid's energy and feeling this kind of heart or energetic connection with her that I hadn't felt, you know, up until that point. So I feel grateful to have come back with that, with that feeling of almost like a relationship. And I guess the final thing was also, I think for me it was really significant both to finally be in Ireland, where my ancestors are from and to be amazed and grateful and surprised at how connected I felt. But also this group of pilgrims that we were

walking with gave me a gift that I didn't realise I needed either, which was this feeling of being part of a tribe of people who all understood one another, even though we were all coming into this for different reasons and had different motivations and even different understandings of Brigid. But I felt like I mentioned before we started recording like I could be 100% wholly myself in this experience, and I felt like I was my best version of myself on this journey. And I think a lot of it was it was both because of the sacredness of the journey and the pilgrimage. But also because I was with a group of people that I felt like I didn't have to hide parts of myself from. You know, especially this newer, more spiritually connected side of myself, which in my day-to-day life, I'm still navigating how much I share with people and how much I don't. And I felt completely held in that group. So that was really powerful. Sorry, that's way more than one one thing.

9. Did your spiritual outlook and connection to or thoughts about Saint Brigid change during the pilgrimage?

So I kind of answered that already. I guess it was really interesting. You know, I have above my desk. There are a couple shelves right here above my desk and I have both of the Brigid's Crosses that I made in our little cross making workshop, and I did buy a triple spiral necklace that I'm not wearing. I should have worn it today that I bought when we were, you know, one of our stops that helps me to feel really connected to her and to that experience. And when we went to the Centre at the end the Bridgid is it Cultural Centre or whatever it was called, you know, and many of us got a Bridget candle. It's so interesting because I actually don't have mine anymore because I already burned it down. So when I came back I immediately felt like whenever I was going to meditate or be in ceremony or even try to do an intuitive reading with someone, I wanted that to be the candle that I used. And I felt like it was like, because we had lit it in her eternal flame, I really felt that connection. And as I was using it and doing that work, it just helped me to feel grounded and more connected to her in that journey. And then I burned it all the way down. I don't, I don't have it anymore but, I think I would say overall I mean yes, as I mentioned before, it helped me feel connected to her and I think it just helped solidify my spiritual path as being the thing that I am meant to be exploring at this stage in my life, and you know, probably for the rest of my life.

10. How far did you travel to take part in the pilgrimage?

So I travelled quite far. I travelled from Northern California and yeah, and it was a, it was a big trip and it was definitely well worth, well worth the journey.

Pilgrim G

1. What was your primary motive for walking the route?

Prior to 2015 I had little or no connection with Brigid. At this time for some reason I can not explain I got an exceptionally strong sense that I needed to partake in the annual pilgrimage from Dundalk to Faughart on the 1st February. On that day Brigid came into my life and hasn't left since. I feel her spirit to the left of me. In particular during challenging times she has been my go to.

I wanted to acknowledge that support and thought how best then by walking in her footsteps along the route taken in 5th century .

2. What does pilgrimage mean to you? What makes a person a pilgrim?

My previous experience of pilgrimage was reading the Canterbury Tales! Or hearing stories of people who gone on a pilgrimage to religious sites often seeking support/guidance in times of ill health, penance and sometimes both.

While many still attend from religious belief (pilgrimage is evident in a number of world religions) these sites have somewhat become tourist attractions, probably providing alternative ways of tapping into that spiritual experience.

3. What was your understanding or connections to St Brigid before embarking on the pilgrimage?

My father (a farmer) was not a church goer but had a very healthy respect for Brigid and shared that with us growing up. Other than that my knowledge was scant.

Prior to 2015 I had never visited Faughart though I grew up across the way in South Armagh and have lived in Co Louth since 2003.

4. Do you feel you understand why the route was taken from Faughart to Kildare? Did you gain that understanding whilst on the pilgrimage?

This was the route allegedly taken by Brigid from her place of birth Faughart to Kildare. On my first walk from Faughart to Dundalk a local historian told us that she crossed through Landowner's land. Apparently, this has now been verified.

The sceptic in me took this information with a pinch of salt but Founder 1's presentation during the pilgrimage profoundly changed that. As he spoke I could visualise the Swan constellation visible in the sky during the time of Brigid. Since then I have googled it and looked at the geographical maps and can see the alignment that connects Faughart with the Curragh.

5. How important to you was it that historical information given about the sites and wells you visited in relation to Brigid.

The route taken by Brigid from Faughart is steeped in history. The information shared was relevant, informative and gave a perspective to the land we walked and sites visited. It gave me a deeper understanding of my purpose as I walked daily.

Brigid's story has long been in oral Irish storytelling and it's a story that hasn't gone away.

6. How important to you was it that the legendary or traditional stories given to you en route?

The line of difference between history and legend is very fine.

Over time the stories of Brigid the Goddess and the saint seemed to have morphed. This is depicted in the amazing wall mural on Bridge St. Dundalk.

Brigid's story has long been in oral Irish storytelling and it's a story that hasn't gone away. From them I learned many of the attributes associated with the trail blazing Brigid that are as relevant today as they were in the 5th century.

7. Did any physical creative or spiritual practice practices enhance your experience on the pilgrimage?

The ritual with the priestess on the Hill of Tara was very moving for me. On that morning the whole experience of pilgrimage was challenged physically. The impact of the ritual took me by surprise. I got an inner sense that motivated me forward and cemented the reason why I was undertaking the journey.

The quiet stillness and contemplative nature of the wells somehow spoke to my inner self.

The relationship between well water and spirituality may be as old as man himself. The of power of these places was magical and energising yet peaceful and soothing.

8. What was your personal gain or take away from pilgrimage?

Being able to walk the full pilgrimage was a personal gain for me. Along the way I benefited from the social and emotional benefits of walking with a group who had similar expectations of the journey.

I have placed images of the many tranquil wells visited into a mental toolbox that I go to when I need to deal with stress. In my head I find myself going to these places more readily and getting better at it with time.

9. Did your spiritual outlook and connections to or thoughts about Brigid during the pilgrimage?

My spiritual connections have somewhat deepened, and I strive to emulate Brigid in my daily life.

Since coming back, I realised that Brigid was in my childhood in the form of Dad and is in my life now in the form of my 8 year old granddaughter.

10. How far did you travel?

Co Louth, Ireland

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