

ON THE KNOCK COMMISSION OF INVESTIGATION OF THE 1879 APPARITION

In a village of about a dozen homes and a Parish Church called Knock in Co Mayo, Ireland, an extraordinary occurrence was reported.

On the night of the 21st of August 1879 the Virgin Mary flanked by St Joseph and a bishop thought to be St John the Evangelist and an altar with a lamb and cross on it allegedly appeared on the gable wall of the Parish Church for a few hours. Fifteen people witnessed the vision including a child of five (page 60, The Evidence for Visions of the Virgin Mary) and stood watching it for two hours allegedly in torrential rain.

A commission to investigate was held 1879 to 1880. 15 testimonies were taken.

The testimonies were written down but are rife with problems and their credibility is totally in shreds.

WHICH OF THE 15 1879 TESTIMONIES AT FACE VALUE IS UNSATISFACTORY

1, Patrick Hill - ORIGINAL LOST, CONTRADICTS THE OTHERS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE EXTREMELY DETAILED ACCOUNT DOES NOT MATCH THE INDICATIONS IN OTHER ACCOUNTS THAT THE VISION MAY HAVE BEEN DISTINCT BUT NOT EXTREMELY CLEAR - UNSATISFACTORY. SHOWS SIGNS OF BEING TAMPERED WITH.

2, Mary McLoughlin - EVIDENCE THAT SHE PUT HER X ON HER DEPOSITION WITHOUT KNOWING ITS CONTENTS. We don't know if she is any good as we have no evidence that she was sober. - UNSATISFACTORY

3, Mary Beirne - OK

4, Patrick Walsh - HE SAW A LIGHT FROM A HALF A MILE AWAY THAT COULD HAVE BEEN A FIRE ON HIS OWN ADMISSION. ORIGINAL LOST. - UNSATISFACTORY EXCEPT FOR THE CLAIM THAT THE LIGHT WAS HIGHER UP THAN WHAT WE HAVE BEEN LED TO BELIEVE. THIS SEEMS AUTHENTIC - PARTLY SATISFACTORY.

5, Patrick Beirne - APART FROM HIS SAYING MARY JOSEPH AND JOHN APPEARED ITS NO GOOD AS THE PRIESTS GLOSSED IT OVER. - UNSATISFACTORY

6, Maggie Beirne - The Mother - ORIGINAL LOST. - UNSATISFACTORY

7, Dominick Beirne - OK

8, Mrs Flatley - ORIGINAL LOST. - UNSATISFACTORY

9, Bridget Trench - THE PUBLISHED VERSION IS A FABRICATION. HER REAL TESTIMONY IS VERY SHORT AND UNIMPRESSIVE. NO EVIDENCE THAT SHE REALLY APPROVED IT OR KNEW WHAT WAS IN IT. SHE SPOKE IN IRISH AND WHAT SHE SAID WAS TRANSLATED. - UNSATISFACTORY

10, Catherine Murray - ORIGINAL LOST. - UNSATISFACTORY

11, John Curry - ONLY A CHILD AND DIDN'T SAY MUCH AND THE TESTIMONY IS NOT HIS TESTIMONY BUT WHAT A PRIEST THOUGHT ABOUT HIS TESTIMONY - ITS HEARSAY. ORIGINAL LOST. - UNSATISFACTORY

12, Judith Campbell - The original testimony shows that she did not sign it. Whoever wrote the testimony signed it in her name. - UNSATISFACTORY

13, Margaret Beirne 2 - OK

14, Dominick Beirne Sen - NO GOOD FOR PLAGIARISED FROM OTHER DEPOSITIONS. - UNSATISFACTORY

15, John Durkan - NO GOOD FOR ITS MERELY SAID HE SAW WHAT THE BEIRNES' SAW. ORIGINAL LOST. - UNSATISFACTORY

There are really only 3 Testimonies. The rest are in the same mode as hearsay. We can't base apparition claims on gossip. The originals being lost and our knowledge that the transcripts of their testimony is not to be trusted is the biggest factor urging us to consider the unsatisfactory testimonies as hearsay.

A testimony cannot stand in court and will be seen as mere hearsay when it is taken too long after the event. When the witnesses may be under pressure to say things. When the witnesses may have unwittingly or deliberately influenced each other. When the testimony shows no sign of really caring about the truth. Not a single witness did anything to ensure that what was seen really was inexplicable. For example, if it happened that if the vision disappeared if somebody stood at a certain point nobody said.

Why do so few of the seers say the vision was clear and distinct? Surely the priests would have asked, "Was the apparition clearly seen?" The silence indicates either that the investigation was slack and careless or that the apparition was vague and the priests didn't want to record that. Either case means that there is insufficient grounds for holding that a miracle happened. You can only say a miracle possibly happened if the evidence is clear enough and good enough. But we can't say that of the Knock depositions.

Why did so few go up close? There is no independent evidence that any of them did apart from Trench. Hill said she went up close. They stood a distance away as if they had to be far away to see the vision right. No wonder the priests probably didn't encourage anybody to consider saying how clear the images were!

Why do so few of the seers claim that the apparition was not flat against the wall? Even some of those that say the figures were rounded indicate that they might have been mistaken.

Why were the seers not asked why some of them disagreed about there being a cross? If they were, we need the record. Where is it? A proper investigation would have kept the explanation for us.

Many of the witnesses stayed for a little while and left at different times. This is odd behaviour if you are seeing a convincing vision. We have no deposition stating why they all left and when they had all gone. Hearsay says the remaining witnesses left the vision unattended to go to help Mrs Campbell and when they returned the gable was all in darkness. If there were props, this was the ideal time for the hoaxer to take them away. We don't know who returned exactly - we can be sure that it was probably at least two unnamed witnesses who returned. It was odd if all the witnesses would need to leave the vision to help Mrs Campbell. And what if statues or the props for the hoax were still there? We don't know if anybody noticed anything odd. It could be that the props could not be seen in the darkness. The departure and end of the vision is a hugely important part of deciding if it was authentic or not but we have nothing but gossip and hearsay to go on.

It makes no sense to have depositions done that just care about the vision and not about what happened when it departed. It just looks like the priests were worried about those details and wanted to ignore them. They were more concerned about descriptions than anything else.