

## **KNOCK**

### A Thought or Two

When religion makes its great shrines, you would think that if evidence came up showing that those shrines were based on false claims that is their days numbered. Wrong. It makes little difference. Absolute proof that Knock was false or at least inconclusively supernatural (one does not have the right to adopt a supernatural explanation when a natural one would do even if one is not sure what the natural explanation is) would not get it closed down. People defy and ignore the evidence. In so far as they do that they are fundamentalists.

Images of Mary and Joseph and others supposedly appeared on the chapel gable at Knock in 1879.

What was seen?

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.

Why the whole village didn't turn out is a mystery. It is said though that the real figure is about twenty (page 8, The Apparition at Knock).

Inconsistencies

Witness Mary Beirne contradicted the witnesses who said there was a cross on the altar that appeared for she said she saw no crucifix or cross (page 25). Margaret Beirne also didn't see the cross (page 27). Dominick Beirne contradicted Patrick Hill who said the altar was totally plain (page 21). Hill said that it had symbols and pictures of angels on it (page 33). It is not even certain that the 1879 commission took more than a day to work on showing the witnesses were telling the truth (page 37). Page 47 has top witness Mary Beirne saying the vision of Mary had a yellow whiteness. She didn't see the vision's feet but Bridget Trench said they were visible and tried to touch them (page 29).

In 1936, she said she couldn't remember seeing a lamb on the altar (page 52).

Those who say all the visionaries stated they saw the same thing are lying because some of the accounts are detailed and others are not. Two boys saw angels flying about but the others never mentioned the angels. This would be an extraordinary omission for people who loved angels to make. The Irish had devotion to dead babies and considered them angels and also they prayed Angel of God, My guardian dear daily.

Mary McLoughlin lied that she went to Beirnes at 7 for Mary Beirne said she didn't see her until 7.30.

There is a serious contradiction between Margaret Beirne going to lock the Church at a certain time and Mary Beirne her sister going to do it at a different time. They were sisters living together. Also we have three different members of the Beirne family who lived in the house together making three separate journeys to tell the household of the apparition. Mary goes to get Dominick at 8 pm. Catherine Murray a niece goes to get Margaret at 8 pm. Margaret goes back at 8.15 to get her mother Widow Beirne out (page 248, Knock The Virgin's Apparition in the Nineteenth Century). The Beirnes were being very untruthful and yet they were considered the main witnesses.

The Beirne house was nearly level with the gable of the Church and was only a short distance from the Church. It would not have been possible to see the vision from the house. But it would have been possible to see the light. The light would have been very noticeable had the likes of Patrick Walsh been telling the truth. Yet we have the people in the house behaving as if it was not noticeable and having to have a number of trips made to them after dark to let them know!

It is strange too that the Archdeacon wouldn't go to the gable to see the apparition. Mary McLoughlin went to tell him. She said she was very precise in her description of the miracle. She was known for drinking a lot and though people said she was sober that night did the Archdeacon know better? He wouldn't even go to his door or window to look out. He had a

good view of the Church gable from the back door and back windows of his house. Moreover, if there really was a bright light at the gable as witnesses said it should have shone in his windows. He could not have missed it. His behaviour was extremely odd. As we shall see, this may have been because he was part of the hoax to create the apparition. A real believer wouldn't sit by the fire when the Virgin Mary was outside. He acted like he knew something and wanted to play the innocent.

All this suggests that there was truth in the suggestion that the apparition was a trick. The witnesses may have lied or perhaps they were deceived thanks to a policeman using a projector or magic lantern as it was called. A magic lantern that was not projecting images but lighting up cutouts on the wall could seem impressive.

Mary Beirne stated that the Virgin's crown was somewhat yellow. A real miracle would have had a gold crown. The crown was meant to be gold so why did the yellow colour not come out right? It was because the vision was a trick. And why did the image of St John closely resemble a statue near Westport as she admitted? Why did the Joseph that appeared fit the unjustified Catholic stereotype that Joseph was an old man when he married Mary? She saw gold stars appearing around the Lamb that appeared next the figures. It never occurred to her that the stars could have been the light shining from the lantern on the rain as it battered against the gable. She admitted that the stars seemed to be caused by reflection. This is very important.

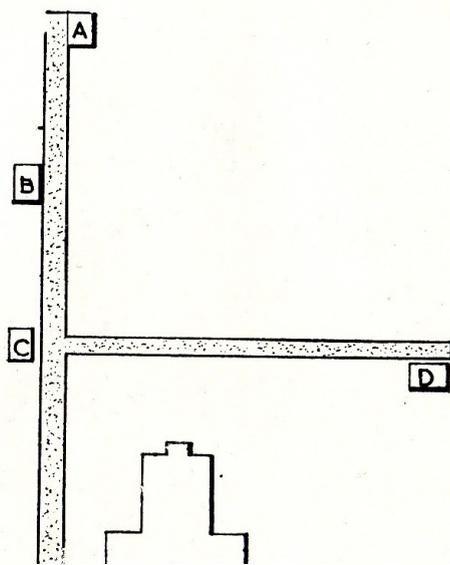
Patrick Walsh who was half a mile from the Church alleged that he saw the light from one of his fields. He said he noticed just a golden light on the gable that night. How then could the stars have appeared to be gold when the light was gold? They wouldn't have been visible then or even noticeable. The witnesses certainly exaggerated what they had seen. They allayed their own doubts by this means. Walsh seems to be contradicted by the statement of Patrick Hill that it was a "soft white light" and that it didn't light up the whole gable - another indication that it was rather weak (page 59, *The Apparition at Knock*). What makes it more plausible is that this was the truth is the fact that Patrick Hill's testimony was over-elaborate and he had imagined things that didn't match what the other visionaries said - maybe he made things up. So when somebody who is prone to the spectacular says something as uninteresting as that the light was soft it rings true. When magic lantern tests were conducted, it was found the light couldn't cover the wall. Maybe that was the prompt for the other witnesses to start saying it covered the wall. This would have been intended to prevent anybody thinking that they had been tricked by a magic lantern.

Problems with who did the witnessing

There is a serious problem as to why the vision was only witnessed by the family and friends of Mary Beirne though there were plenty of other people in Knock. Did she know that there was something odd about the whole thing that made her afraid to go to unbiased people? Or was there a conspiracy to say the vision had happened?

Another interesting point is that Mary Beirne could have moulded the perception of the others of what was seen at the gable for she quickly took on a leadership role and was the first to suggest it was the Virgin Mary (page 206, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*). She seems to have been behind the acceptance by the witnesses that the bishop was St John the Evangelist. It is interesting that God would send John holding a book to suggest he wrote the Fourth Gospel when scholarship shows that he did not. Anyway there could have been a strange light and she led the rest to think they saw these figures inside the light. The illusion hypothesis is a possibility.

The other problem is that if they were seeing a truly clear and remarkable vision why did they stand where they did? See below.



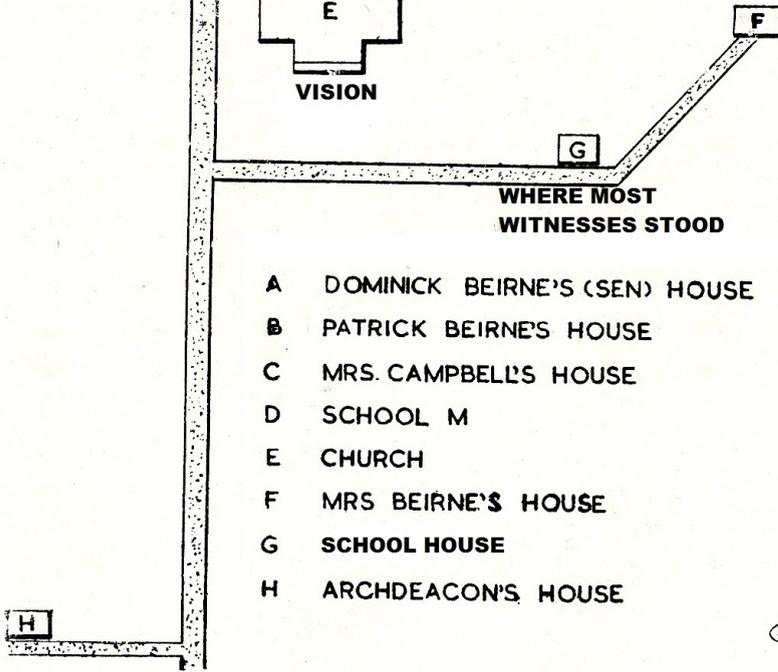


DIAGRAM SHOWING KNOCK CHURCH AND SURROUNDINGS IN 1879

THE IMAGE ABOVE SHOWS THE SCHOOLHOUSE EVEN FURTHER AWAY THAN WHAT IT WAS.

BELOW IS AN ORDINANCE SURVEY IMAGE. AGAIN THE VIEW FROM THE SCHOOLHOUSE WAS FROM WHAT WOULD BE AN AWKWARD ANGLE. YOU DON'T STAND IN THAT POSITION IF YOU SEE A VISION AND MORE TO THE POINT NEITHER DO FOURTEEN OTHER PEOPLE.



Why did nobody admit to the hoax?

Who would have wanted to refute an apparition that was bringing money into the impoverished village? Soon after the apparition, it cost a fortune, a shilling and sixpence, to sleep in Knock in an armchair (page 67, The Evidence for Visions of the Virgin Mary).

The Knock commissions of Investigation

Knock cannot be from God because the first commission was careless and did not ask the right questions or work out why the witnesses were sometimes contradicting one another (page 66, The Cult of the Virgin Mary). God would do better than that. The first commission is the most important one. They did not try to explain why there was a dispute about if there was

a Lamb there or not or if there were glittering stars or if the crown was somewhat yellow or gold or if there were angels flying about or if there was a cross on the altar that appeared in the vision with the Lamb standing on it. Patrick Hill was known to have added a lot to his original description when he was interviewed in 1897. Patrick Beirne only looked at the vision for ten minutes and then left so he was not too impressed by what he had seen and only testified in its favour for the sake of the rest in the group.

The first commission was held for only one day 8th October 1879 (page 174, Knock The Virgin's Apparition in the Nineteenth Century). We don't know who set it up or who the members were or how many. We don't know who it was supposed to report to. Early sources say Archbishop John MacHale set it up. Later reports say it was MacEivilly (page 175, Knock The Virgin's Apparition in the Nineteenth Century). A reliable source, Monsignor D'Alton of Tuam stated that it was indeed MacEivilly. All these things are important. If the commission was in any way illegitimate then we can't accept its authority. The questions we are left with make us wonder if the commission knew what it was doing at all.

The depositions made by the witnesses are generally agreed to have been the product of many stages of development (page 185, Knock The Virgin's Apparition in the Nineteenth Century). The commission members seem to have perverted the accounts and the testimony to make it more convincing (page 211, Knock The Virgin's Apparition in the Nineteenth Century).

It is a serious problem how the signatures on three of them were penned by the same person (page 185, Knock The Virgin's Apparition in the Nineteenth Century). Scholars have determined that the commission was putting words in the visionaries mouths (page 189). The eloquence of the testimonies was far beyond the abilities of the simple speakers. The depositions did not state the name of the priests to whom they were made. The priests did not sign. Worse some of them were probably made to only one priest.

It is known that Archdeacon Cavanagh was a member of the commission despite claiming bizarre visions of lights at the Church and columns of light (page 115, The Apparition at Knock). Also he was bottling rainwater that washed down the gable the morning after the apparition to make holy water with healing powers. He did not have an open mind. He was hell bent on affirming the miracles and the reality of the vision. He was disqualified thereby. And the other members of the commission were disqualified merely by letting him in the door.

Why would the Archdeacon say the things he said? - he must have been warned that his credulity was dangerous to the credibility of the apparition. Was it because he felt the 21 August vision at the gable was somehow dubious or absurd and that he needed to bolster its believability? There can be no other explanation. Also he didn't go to see the 21 August vision when invited and stated that it was probably a reflection from a stained glass window! Yet the next day started him on an extraordinary course of credulity. His actions on 21 August are contrived. He acted suspiciously. He acted like a man who knew the vision was a hoax and pretended to be sceptical and therefore innocent of any collusion. Then when the hoax had taken place he became determined to have it thought to be a miracle.

Why do many people believe the vision was supernatural?

One reason is the brightness of the light. Reason two is the dryness of the ground under the apparition. Reason three is that no shadow was mentioned - if the image had been projected the rain battering down or somebody going in front of the light source would have made shadows. Reason four is that the images were detailed - they were too clear for a magic lantern production. Reason five is the statement of a visionary that the images had roundedness - ie were three-dimensional. But all of these elements could be explained by error, illusion, imagination. They can be explained naturally. The case for the supernatural nature of the vision rests on very small things - and it is the small things that most of the discrepancies appear in relation to. Were the small things that indicate a supernatural origin mistakes?

The three dimensional thing is refuted by the idea that the figures went from outside the gable to onto the gable when approached. the witnesses said that the images seemed to dissolve and go back into the wall when you went near them so they only looked detailed from a certain distance. A miracle wouldn't need to do that. It is easy to look at your television and imagine that the figures are standing outside it and are rounded. Try it. The images going flat on the gable indicate that they never had any three dimensional quality at all. And if the images go flat when you go near you cannot know for sure that they are three-dimensional.

Surely God could have made sure the events were recorded in a more accurate and more credible fashion and by more reliable people?

Knock and the scientific method

The scientific method is - Observe what is happening in matter and in the universe and the world. Form a theory about why it happens and in the way it happens. Do experiments to test this theory. If the theory is proven, then we say we have

discovered that we can predict that similar things in similar situations will have similar results.

The Knock apparition is outside of all this if it is miraculous. We cannot have the same degree of belief in it as we would if something was shown to be true by a scientific experiment.

Science at the gable on the day of the apparition would say, "Mary can't appear here." The apparition rejects the science and opposes it. It opposes the very thing that has given us today's quality of life. You are either for science or against it.

There are discrepancies and contradictions between the accounts. Believers say that the errors do not refute the vision for they are not part of the main and important details. But then they contradict this by calling upon the smallest details to bolster the claim that the vision was supernatural. The main details fail to do that.

The evidences for the supernatural being at work are very small if not non-existent. That is why we should not take the evidences for something supernatural very seriously. Sometimes people can misremember something or make some mistake in a tiny matter that affects the bigger interpretation. When the police investigate a case and there are minor discrepancies between the statements of the witnesses the police regard the errors as a sign of honesty among the witnesses. And nothing more.

The Knock apparition is based on hearsay. That is what people desperate for spiritual peace are devoting time and money to.

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