

## **KNOCK APPARITION: PERHAPS THE WITNESSES LIED?**

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 of Knock for a few hours. Fifteen people witnessed the vision including a child of five (page 60, The Evidence for Visions of the Virgin Mary). Witness statements were published in a highly altered and edited form that differed hugely from the real ones the witnesses made. That the witnesses didn't do the slightest thing about the lies speaks strongly against them as honest people.

All the witnesses just mentioned what they saw. Could it be that they just saw a magic lantern show and knew it? Could it be that their testimonies are true and the fault for making a miracle out of the tale lies with the interpreters?

The images they saw were described by many of them as statues. These people did not protest when the Church lied that the appearances were of the Virgin and Co as opposed to statues. They let the Church lie and thus were complicit in those lies. Not one of the witnesses mentioned praying to the images as if they were the real Mary etc. Bridget Trench supposedly tried to touch the feet of the Mary statue and said thanks to God and Mary for the manifestation. But she did not treat the entity as the real Mary or say it was. She venerated the Mary image in the typical fashion when a devout Catholic comes across a holy statue. Not one of the witnesses went to the images to touch clothes and possessions and rosaries to them. This was bizarre. Irish people of the time were fanatical about relics. Judith Campbell's mother was dying so why didn't she bring a holy statue or something from the house to touch it to the vision and then give it to her mother in the hope of a cure?

They also let worshippers come with the intention of honouring the apparition as an example of Mary and co coming to Knock in person. That is idolatry for the apparition was of statues and statues cannot see or hear or help you. Even Catholic teaching concedes that they cannot.

The Church took depositions from the witnesses about the apparition but made no effort to get affidavits from the police or others as to the honesty of the witnesses. The depositions cannot be taken seriously as evidence for a genuine miracle with that question mark hanging over them.

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE WITNESSES**

Nine of the witnesses were related. Five of these people lived in the one house (page 178, Knock The Virgin's Apparition in Nineteenth Century Ireland). Mary Beirne, Margaret, Dominick Jun, Margaret the mother and the niece Catherine Murray are the five (page 165, Knock The Virgin's Apparition in Nineteenth Century Ireland). Dominick Beirne Sen and Patrick Hill were relatives to the Beirnes.

Joseph Smith the fraudulent prophet of Mormonism got 8 witnesses to see the golden plates. Their testimony is printed in at the start of the Book of Mormon. It has been observed that their testimony is suspicious because of the close family ties.

Four were from the Whitmer family, one was a Whitmer in law, and three were from Smith's own family. Why could Smith not get strangers off the street to see the plates? Why did the circle have to be too cosy for comfort? The testimony was written by Smith and they signed it. The parallel with Knock is that the testimony is just as brief and general as many of the Knock testimonies and it is known that the priests did not write down the testimonies word for word as the witnesses gave their version of events.

## **TESTIMONY OF THREE WITNESSES TO BOOK OF MORMON**

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That we, through the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, have seen the plates which contain this record, which is a record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, his brethren, and also of the people of Jared, who came from the tower of which hath been spoken. And we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us; wherefore we know of a surety that the work is true. And we also testify that we have seen the engravings which are upon the plates; and they have been shewn unto us by the power of God, and not of man. And we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; and we know that it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ,

that we beheld and bear record of these things are true. And it is marvellous in our eyes. Nevertheless, the voice of the Lord commanded us that we should bear record of it; wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, we bear testimony of these things. And we know that if we are faithful in Christ, we shall rid our garments of the blood of all men, and be found spotless before the judgment-seat of Christ, and shall dwell with him eternally in the heavens. And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen.

### TESTIMONY OF EIGHT WITNESSES TO BOOK OF MORMON

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That Joseph Smith, Jun., the Author and Proprietor of this work, has shewn unto us the plates of which hath been spoken, which have the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated we did handle with our hands; and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship. And this we bear record with words of soberness, that the said Smith has shewn unto us, for we have seen and hefted, and know of a surety that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken. And we give our names unto the world, to witness unto the world that which we have seen. And we lie not, God bearing witness of it.

These testimonies are useless because Smith himself wrote them and got them to sign. There is no reason to believe all who signed agreed with what he wrote. Just like the Knock testimonies, there was too much control taken away from the alleged witnesses.

### COLLUSION A POSSIBILITY

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?

Collusion is possible because fifteen out of possibly twenty witness were selected for questioning by the commission of investigation and they were all connected. Five lived in the one house and were all relatives (page 165, Knock The Virgin's Apparition in Nineteenth Century Ireland). Nine were related.

The Beirnes were very close to Father Cavanagh and would naturally have abhorred the threatening treatment he got from his parish (page 165, Knock The Virgin's Apparition in Nineteenth Century Ireland). They were sacristans of the Church. Most of the other visionaries were very devoted to the priest. Witness Mary McLoughlin was the priest's housekeeper and a friend of the Beirnes.

Why did a man born in Knock 1898 and why did Mary Beirne's son who was born in Knock 1886 state that when they were growing up there nobody talked about the apparition? (page 316, Knock The Virgin's Apparition in Nineteenth Century Ireland). If people give a false testimony naturally they will give it and want to give it no more except maybe to a few journalists or when compelled to give it. Otherwise they put it out of their heads.

The old woman who witnessed the vision, Bridget Trench, wouldn't have liked to say anything that contradicted the other witnesses because she depended on them to feed her (page 191, Knock The Virgin's Apparition in Nineteenth Century Ireland). Mary Mc Loughlin depended on her job as priest's housekeeper which was a restriction on her. The priest supported the apparition from the very morning after so that tied her tongue if she had any fibs in relation to the claimed vision to confess.

Religion likes to present us with witnesses to miracles and argue that their sincerity was proved when they endured great persecution and trouble for their testimony. Such people will be regarded as strong witnesses. There are so many conflicting miracle claims that we are forced to consider the ones with the strongest testimony. Indeed that is what we should be doing anyway. Does the apparition of Knock have this strong testimony?

No - they did not prove their sincerity by holding to their claims in the face of ridicule and persecution. The Knock witnesses had no trouble at all. In fact their lives were made better and their whole village was lifted economically out of the sewers as a result of their claims. Strong witnesses? I don't think so.

## WHAT WERE THE VISIONARIES SET TO GAIN FROM THEIR TALE?

The witnesses would have seen the creation of a shrine at Knock as a means to get out of dire poverty. An apparition gets attention put on your area's problems. It also brings curiosity seekers and the devout and that alone boosts the local economy.

Lourdes was revitalised economically by the 1858 apparition. The Archdeacon had a huge devotion to Mary. So he would certainly have told the alleged witnesses plenty about how Mary appeared at Lourdes, during Mass.

We read that when he first came to serve at Knock as priest, that the people in the parish barely subsisted on what they had (page 36, Venerable Archdeacon Cavanagh). Another factor causing this dire poverty was the poor quality of the land (page 36, *ibid*). The year of the apparition 1879 was the worst year in Knock since the Famine (page 64, Venerable Archdeacon Cavanagh). The parish was malnourished and on the verge of famine as blight had ravaged the potatoes. Typhus fever was rampant throughout the primitive cabin houses (page 63, Venerable Archdeacon Cavanagh). These were people that needed a miracle. And in the month of the apparition, the area was left devastated because thanks to the heavy rains the autumn potato crop failed (page 68, Venerable Archdeacon Cavanagh). We read that Archbishop Lynch of Toronto went to Knock and wrote in 1882 that he saw great misery in Knock and remarked how many families were evicted from their humble homes as three failed harvests had meant they didn't have the rent money (page 80, 82, Venerable Archdeacon Cavanagh). All the witnesses were set to indirectly gain a lot from the vision.

Page 62, The Apparition at Knock, alludes to the fact that some of the witnesses did gain from the vision directly

These things do not prove that they were dodgy. They do weaken the evidence for the apparition. For example, if you say you see a supernatural being and you turn that to your financial advantage, that suggests you may not have seen the being at all for you don't have much respect for it or fear of it.

## REASONS TO SUSPECT THERE WAS NOBODY AT THE GABLE THAT NIGHT!

The closeness of the "witnesses".

The Archdeacon did not see the light - at least that is what he said. He should have noticed a glare at his bedroom window which faced the gable and he supposedly went to bed early that night.

Patrick Walsh should have thought the Church was on fire when he saw the light from a half a mile away. Why did nobody else from that distance or more see it from their houses? Would he have really been out in the fields in the dark on such a wet night? Indeed its claimed from oral testimony ie gossip that he thought somebody had lit a fire beside the Church (page 73, The Apparition at Knock).

The fibs told by the Beirnes don't mark them out as very honest.

Margaret Beirne thought it was her job to lock the Church at a certain time on the night of the apparition while Mary thought it was hers to do it at a different time. One of these ladies was lying because they lived in the same house and would not have had this confusion.

Another problem is that most of the Beirne visionaries lived in the same house and yet you have Mary going to tell Dominick about the vision at 8 and Catherine to tell Margaret at 8 and Margaret going back to tell her mother at 8.15? (page 248, Knock The Virgin's Apparition in Nineteenth Century Ireland).

Mary Mc Loughlin told the commission a lie that there was an apparition of a cross. She denied it later and blamed the newspapers.

The way every account given to the commission is based on the framework of Mary Beirne's testimony.

Did they pick a wet night when nobody neutral would be likely to have been about so that they could lie about having been at the gable?

Irish people would not have let one of their number leave her mother unattended in a house when she was dying. Judith Campbell did not leave her mother and lied that she did. The nun of Kenmare who was close to the witnesses wrote:

"it must also be remembered that the woman was left absolutely alone; that she was believed to be actually in her agony."

She meant the final agony.

The dying and seriously ill are traditionally taken to holy shrines for a cure. Why didn't they pick the old lady up and carry her to the gable despite the rain?

Why was the priest not summoned that night to the bedside of dying Mrs Campbell if she had made it out to her front door in an effort to see the apparition and collapsed so that she was mistaken for dead?

Why didn't the police seem to know of the light? The barracks was only 300 yards away and had a view of the gable!

## STORY STRAIGHT

The witnesses who were investigated had from August 21 to the date of the investigation October 8th 1879 to get their stories straight and "remember" it in a way that fitted what the others were saying.

In Ballyhaunis, there was a stained glass image of Mary and two others standing in a pose reminiscent of the pose of the figures at Knock.

Below, you can see the image that apart from the colours in the robes could be the bishop who appeared at Knock who was assumed to be Saint John. He has the hand raised in the same way, wears a small mitre and even gazes in the same direction as the Knock bishop did. The only major differences are that he carries a crook not a gospel book and his robes are coloured and not pure white.



The temperance medal image of a lamb on an altar with a cross behind matches what some the visionaries supposedly saw on the gable.



All the seers had to do to remember what to say was to recall the images on the stained-glass window at the Roman Catholic Church at Ballyhaunis and the altar and cross lamb on the temperance medal. These depicted the images at Knock very closely - before the apparitions took place. There was a close connection between Ballyhaunis and Knock (page 236, Knock The Virgin's Apparition in Nineteenth Century Ireland).

The Archdeacon was one of the three or four priests chosen to investigate. He was the chairman (182). The commission never took the testimony of the seers word for word but changed it (page 182, Knock The Virgin's Apparition in Nineteenth Century Ireland).

It is inexplicable that the witnesses who knew of pictures of St Patrick holding his hand in blessing and wearing a mitre didn't think the bishop figure was him. Someone manipulated the seers into thinking it was St John the Evangelist. That person was Mary Beirne later Mary Mc Connell. That they agreed when it should have been so unnatural for them to, shows how she was getting into their minds. She was very effective.

"CONCLUSION"

Were they at the gable at all? The only evidence against collusion and lies is that the witnesses did not make a huge deal out of their experience. But the Archdeacon certainly did so they did not need to. And what if they had regrets and doubts and dealt with them by keeping their heads down? Not all fraudsters do all they can to gain from what they have done.