

### The Knock apparitions could have been paintings

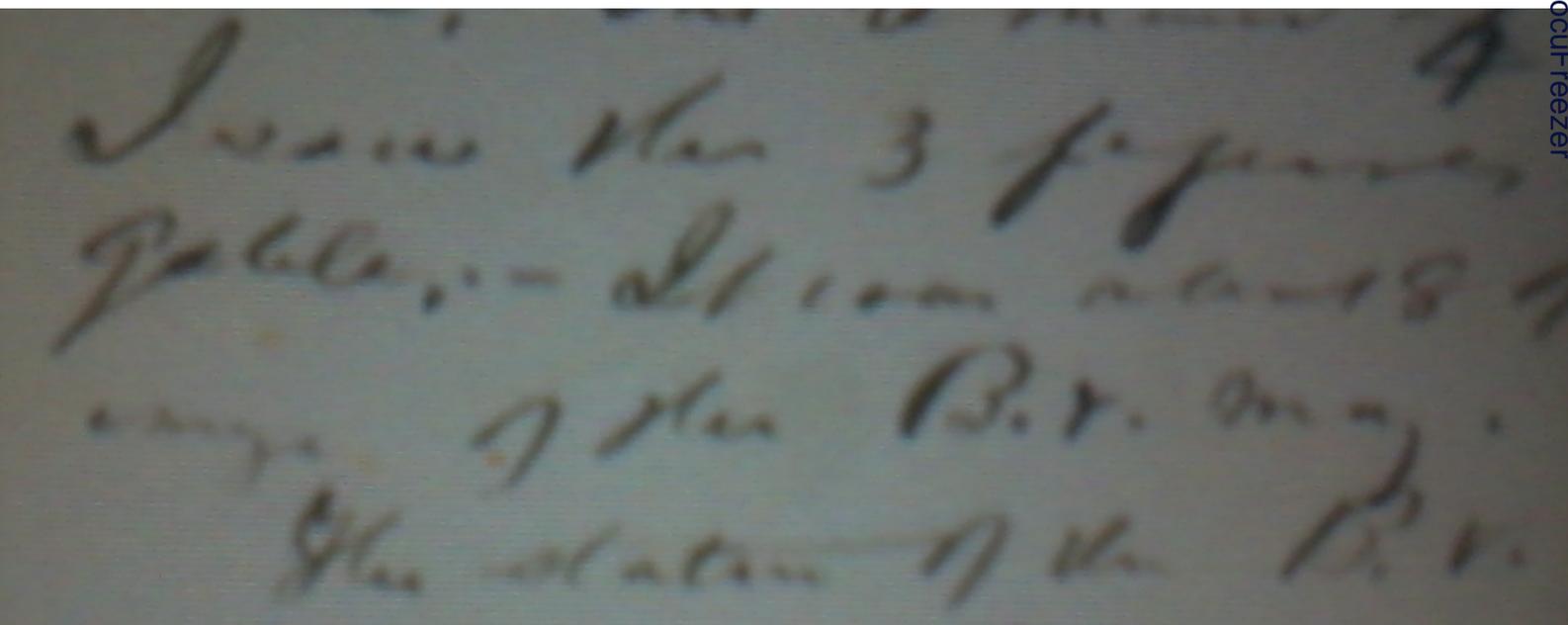
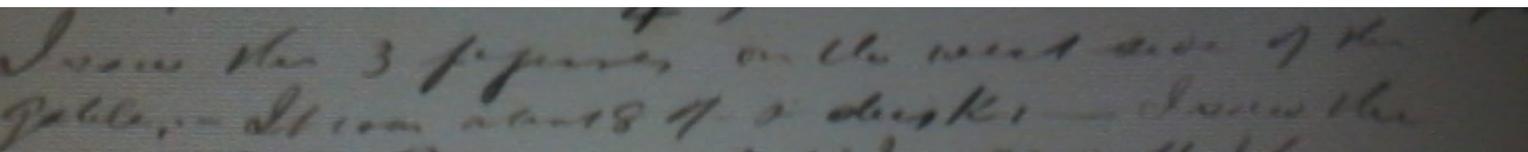
On the night of the 21st of August 1879 the Virgin Mary flanked by St Joseph and a bishop thought to be St John the Evangelist and an altar with a lamb and cross on it allegedly appeared on the gable wall of the Parish Church of Knock for a few hours. Fifteen people witnessed the vision including a child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

#### LIKE A PICTURE?

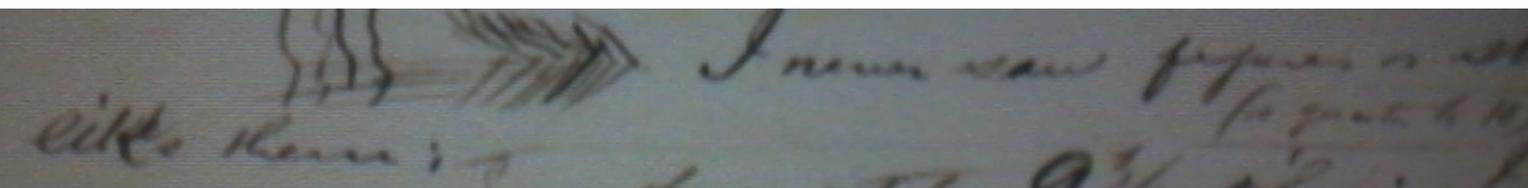
Mary Beirne's July 1880 deposition states, " I beheld, all at once, standing out from the gable, and rather to the west of it, three figures which, on more attentive inspection, appeared to be that of the Blessed Virgin, of St. Joseph, and St. John." This is a fabrication. What she really testified to was simply, "I saw 3 figures on the west side of the gable." The on is of utmost importance. The month and year is written on the deposition foolscap.

Her testimony was not taken in October 1879 like that of some of the others was. It is odd that the lady considered to be the main witness, the central witness, was not chosen to be among one of the first people interviewed by the commission. Elements of exaggeration always creep in if the interview is left too long. Our memories are never completely accurate recollections of events. Our memories are reconstructions of our past lives. Surprisingly, her testimony as she gave it is sober and tame and almost boring. She would have wanted to convince herself and others that something more gripping happened. A testimony being tame does not eliminate the possibility that it sounds better and more persuasive and more miraculous than what actually happened.

She called them figures, images and statues. Confused wasn't she?

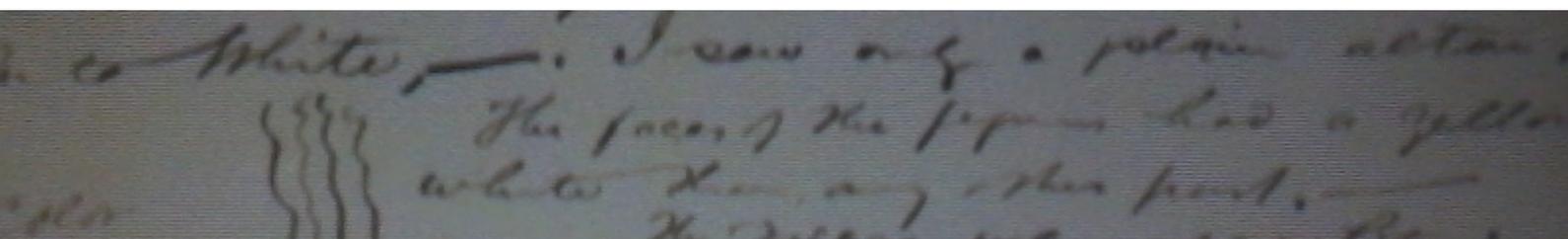


In that light, her claim in her testimony that she never saw figures like them is spurious. They were nothing special.



Her alleged claim that "they stood a little distance out from the gable wall" - this is not that reliable for she never went up close enough. And she contradicted that in other statements. Worse, she never indicated in the original testimony that the figures stood out. She spoke of them as being on the gable wall.

She said she saw only a plain altar meaning she did not see a lamb and a cross. Some of the others said they saw a lamb on the altar and a cross indicating that imagination played a role.



The faces having a yellower white than any other part of the images all of which were white indicates a fraud. There was a failed attempt to make the images look more lifelike. And the hands were pure white when they should have been the same colour as the face. The error with the colour indicates that the images were not as clear as we are led to believe.

She testified that no rain fell on the grass at the gable or on the gable itself. She gives no hint that this was a miracle. The natural interpretation is that the rain was not falling in the direction of the gable. If she had seen it as a miracle, it would have been seized upon by the priest interviewing her.

She contradicted herself in her original testimony by saying there was a brilliant light and then by saying that it was only a bright kind of light.

Later she said that during Father Lennon's investigation, she was shown projected images from a magic lantern in test to see if the result looked like the apparition. She said they were trying to make pictures like what she saw but they could not make them like the apparition. She admitted later in life that the images were like they were painted on the wall - sounds like a possible magic lantern to me!

Like Patrick her brother, she stated that the light around the vision was like the soft silvery light of the moon.

Many suspected that it was caused by a magic lantern, a projector. Indeed in 1935, Liam Na Cadhain interviewed Mary Beirne then Mary O Connell and she declared, "The light about the figures was not like any light I ever saw but more like the soft silvery light of the moon" (page 50, The Apparition at Knock). A soft light! This refutes the lying witnesses who swore the light was very very bright. And it proves that it could have been the light that comes from a magic lantern which would not be exceptionally bright. Though it is true that she was testifying a long time after the vision, this would be a true memory. People her age easily remember things they never did or things they never seen. She was well aware of the danger of saying the light was dullish - it was giving fuel to the sceptics and contradicting the lying witnesses who said it was brighter than the noon-day sun.

In 1936, Mary Beirne stated that the vision looked like a painting when close enough, "When we went near the wall, the figures seemed to go back to the wall, as if painted on it. Then when we came back from the wall, they seemed to stand out and come forward". Clearly, her testimony that the images seemed flat is the most reliable as she noticed this the closer she got. What you see at a distance is less convincing that what you see if you stand closer. She swore to this in 1936 on her deathbed for a Church investigation.

Patrick Hill let it slip that the images were on the gable not at it. He was a bad liar when it came to his saying that the vision stood out from the wall.

"I went then up closer ; I saw everything distinctly. The figures were full and round, as if they had a body and life ; they said nothing, but as we approached they seemed to go back a little towards the gable". The as if and the seemed indicate that he was uncertain that the images stood out from the wall.

He told the Daily Telegraph in 1880, that he was told that the images were on the gable wall. "Oh, come up to the chapel, and see the Blessed Virgin against the wall". That same year he told the Weekly News that he lifted a child up to see the images on the gable.

It has been suggested that the images were created by an artist with luminous paint. This has been rejected for the artist would have been caught at work for it would have been time-consuming and would have had to clean the wall before the morning. A stronger objection is that the heavy rain would have washed the paint off and ruined the images.

It is possible that cut outs were put on the wall and a light was fixed to the gable out of sight to shine on them.

We must remember that nobody saw the images coming or going. All the artist had to do was stick them to the wall when nobody was about. It was easy to remove them when everybody was out of the way. If he wanted rid of the people before he could remove the images all he had to do was pick a night when he was sure it would rain. He would have hoped that if the rain were heavy enough the witnesses would have abandoned the tableau. Also, he knew that if there was a way to get the light to go out the image would soon vanish causing them to disperse.

A magic lantern could easily have been used to create the lower bodies of the images. The upper half of the bodies could have been mere paintings that the lantern was shining on. More detail was necessary for the faces and the hands - the upper parts. It is possible that the altar with the lamb and the cross was really a box that was fastened temporarily to the wall and concealed the magic lantern and mirrors required to make the image.

The Apparition at Knock rejects the idea that the images were painted using luminous paint or phosphorus on canvas hung on the wall for at 300 yards they were mistaken for statues which wouldn't have happened. But we must remember that if you saw strange shapes in vague bodily form at that distance in the grounds of a Catholic Church you would take them for statues for that is what you would expect. What you expect to see influences what you think you see. The paint would have looked white or greenish in the daytime so the book is wrong to say that the apparition being seen in daytime at that distance means it was not a luminous painting. I'd say that four canvases were used and each one cut into the shape of the thing represented. That would explain this. The mysterious light was from a hidden lamp. This would have kept the phosphorus stable because normally it would fade out in parts. The painting was done in such a way that it looked real and detail could be seen. Something must have been erected to keep the rain off the images for rain would ruin the phosphorus. The book debunks the possibility of illusion but ignores the fact that these images painted by phosphorus might have done so much and illusion and imagination did the rest. The contradictions between the witnesses show that hallucination was at play to some extent. A crude trick could have been played and the witnesses imagined the rest, they could have imagined the things that make the vision seem convincing.

If a canvas was used, perhaps the magic lantern was behind it? In that case, the lantern was just used not to project images at all but to brighten up images on the canvas.

The witness who supposedly said the ground was miraculously dry below the apparition would have wet hands. If you expect the ground to be dry and your hands are wet then you could think the ground is dry. Perhaps a shelter that wasn't seen was attached to the wall by the hoaxer to keep the phosphorous figures dry? Or was a sheet of glass used and a light source used to project images on to it or to light up images already on it? Did the glass protect the ground from the rain?

The alleged HEAVY rain is hard to verify. The witnesses say little about it. Too little. Patrick Beirne said there was no rain only drizzle. The rain against the gable is a myth propagated to make out that the images would have been washed away if they were painted.

## FLAT AGAINST THE WALL?

Was the Vision flat against the gable wall?

There is no strong and certain testimony that the vision stood out from the wall. A paltry three of the visionaries said that the figures were or seemed to be out from the wall. But if you project a picture of a person on a wall and pretend that it is a ghost you will find that your imagination does seem to cause you to perceive that the image is not on the wall but in front of it.

According to the Church, Trench said, " I went in immediately to kiss, as I thought, the feet of the Blessed Virgin ; but I felt nothing in the embrace but the wall." She supposedly said the figures were full and round but this seems to indicate that she touched the wall when she expected to touch feet that were out from the wall. The images were flat against the wall. Her eyesight is suspect if she said Mary had something on her head like a crown. She couldn't be definite.

Hill said in 1880 as reported by the Daily Telegraph that he was told to go to the gable and see the images on it.

Hill said the images were out from the wall but went on the wall if you went too close.

He also said, they were "full and round, as if they had a body and life". Note the "as if" - he was not sure if they had body.

He told the Weekly News 1880 that he lifted John Curry up to see the images ON the gable.

Catherine Murray told the Weekly News 1880 that she had "seen the three figures on the gable."

Patrick Hill said that Brigid Trench said said the images went on the wall when she got too close "they receded, she said, from her".

John Curry said Trench touched the picture (1937, New York Tribunal). The images were then flat on the wall.

Mary Beirne said the figures stood out from the wall "they stood a little distance out from the gable wall". She also said that the images seemed to retreat into the wall when approached – maybe that was an illusion. When you are far off a projected image it is easier to think it is three dimensional but when you get close it is easier to see that it is on the wall. She added that she saw attempts to recreate the vision using slides but there was no comparison (The Apparition at Knock, page 50).

In 1880 she said to the Weekly News that she "thought they were a couple of feet out from the gable, and then, when we [her and McLoughlin] went on, they seemed to go back into the gable."

She stated in the 1930s that close up the images seemed painted on the wall (The Apparition at Knock, page 62). "When we went near the wall, the figures seemed to go back to the wall, as if painted on it. Then when we came back from the wall, they seemed to stand out and come forward".

There was no need for the vision to turn into a painting when approached. Her perception of the image as coming out from the wall when they moved away from it is most likely to be inaccurate as she was at a distance from it.

Patrick Beirne said in the thirties that the vision" appeared to be something like shadows or reflections cast on a wall on a moon-lit night. I approached nearer the gable and passed my hand along the wall to find there was no material substance there".

The vision was a flat shadowy thing.

Painting is a possibility. The magic lantern rumour could explain the light and paintings explain the images.

 [Print Friendly and PDF](#)