

# **Unity in Division**

**A History of Christianity in Kilcock and  
Newtown Parish 400 – 2000**

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# The Ecclesiastical History of Hortland Graveyard

*Olive Morrin*

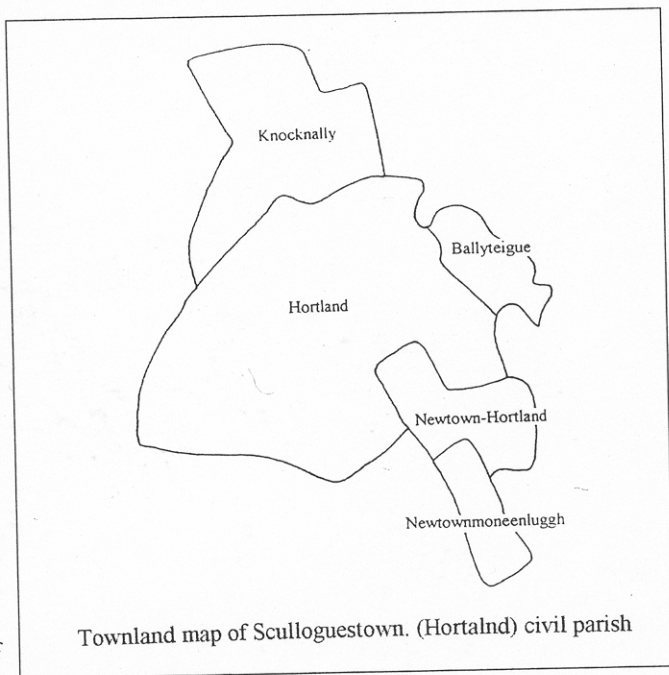
**H**ortland Graveyard is situated c.two miles north-west of Newtown. Formerly called Ballysculloge alias Scullogestown it was one of eight parishes in the barony of Ikeathy and Oughterany.<sup>1</sup> The present parish of Kilcock and Newtown now contains the former 'ancient ecclesiastical divisions of Kilcock, Cloncurry, Scullogestown and Clonshambo'.<sup>2</sup>

According to Samuel Lewis in 1837 Hortland is bounded on the south by the Bog of Allen and contains the seat of Josiah W. Hort and W. Coats Esq. of Knockanally. In the Church of Ireland parochial divisions Hortland was a vicarage in the diocese of Kildare which formed part of the Union of Kilcock and the rectory was impropriate in Lord Cloncurry. In Roman Catholic divisions it also formed part of the Union or district of Kilcock.<sup>3</sup>

The townlands in the parish were Hortland, Ballyteigue, Knockanally, Newtown-Hortland and Newtownmoneenluggagh. The Blackwater river runs close to the west of the graveyard to the immediate south-west.

The parish of Scullogestown contained 2,468 acres. The older Irish Ballysculloge or Baile Mac Sculoig came eventually to mean the town of the 'small farmer'. Originally according to Joyce 'scoil' meaning school was associated with young monks or scholars who carried out the farm work for the monastery and so the term came to mean a small farmer who worked his own land.<sup>4</sup>

The first reference to a church in Scullogstown was in the early thirteenth century when Roger de Hereford gave the church to St. Thomas' Abbey, Dublin.<sup>5</sup> Later that



Townland map of Scullogestown. (Hortland) civil parish

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century Galfridus de Hereford and St Thomas' Abbey settled a lawsuit between them concerning the right to the patronage of the church of 'Balimascoloe'. On the 25th June 1245 Galfridus dropped his claims and the convent ex gratia agreed to give Galfridus and his heirs the right to appoint vicars. A clergyman named William was named as vicar of Ballysculloge in 1336.<sup>6</sup>

Maurice O'Doghyrde was presented to the benefices of 'Balmascolloke' by Walter Wellesley last bishop of Kildare before the Reformation. The disturbed and confused state of the catholic clergy probably explains why on the 23rd May 1538, although described as vicar of Balmascolloke, he was included in a list of absentee clergymen holding benefices.<sup>7</sup> Dr. Roche Mac Geoghegan who was Bishop of Kildare from 1629-1644 had a list drawn up of the sites of ancient parish churches and chapels in the Diocese of Kildare. Scullogstown is listed as *Ecclesia de BallynaScolloigy*. In the early 1700s William Balfe is described as Parish Priest of Scullogstown. He was ordained in 1698 by Dr. John Sleyne Bishop of Cork.<sup>8</sup>

The effects of the Reformation, Penal Laws and Plantations which started in the sixteenth century and continued into the eighteenth century had a devastating effect on the catholic population. Impropriated parishes were deemed monastic property, hence they passed to the crown and soon much was controlled by laymen who collected the tithes from a reluctant population. Church buildings had been poorly maintained even before the Reformation and by the end of the disturbed sixteenth century many were in ruins.<sup>9</sup>

In the Civil Survey of 1654-56 Morrice fitzGerald of Osberstown, Irish Papist is the proprietor of the town and lands of Scullogstown. He is in possession of 420 acres whose letting value in 1640 was estimated to be £160.00. On the land is a stone house worth £20.00 also a quarry of stone. An indication of the dispersion of the catholic population is made evident by the entry

*The great and small tithes of the aforesaid parrish of  
Skullogstowne were in the year 1640 possessed by  
Christopher Golborne Clerke, but how the same were then  
set or worth to be set cannot be found out by reason yt most  
of the inhabitants of the aforesaid Barrony of Keathy and  
Oughtterreny are either dead of transplanted into  
Connaught.<sup>10</sup>*

The glebe land of the Parish of Skullogstowne in 1640 was in possession of Lieut. Wainman. It was estimated to be four acres and its letting value to be 15s.<sup>11</sup>

In post-Reformation Ireland the Mass was at the centre of organised religion. Its pervasiveness was an indication of the failure to enforce the Act of Uniformity. If a Catholic had property Mass was often said in his house, where plantation was extensive Mass was said in sheds or in the open air on makeshift altars. Sometimes Catholics managed to build their own places of worship. They were called 'chapels' as the word

'church' was reserved for Protestant buildings. The Protestants used the more derogatory term 'mass-house' and both terms were used.<sup>12</sup> In the Report on the State of Popery in Ireland 1731 Thomas Baylie Vicar of Kilcock reported that:

*Balliscullogue hath no chappell or mass house Nunnery or Friary or popeish Schoolmaster but publick mass is said on Sundays by Andrew Egan... at ye house of Mr. John Fitzgerald.*<sup>13</sup>

The Rev. Shem Thompson vicar of Kilcock recorded the religious population of his own and surrounding parishes. On the 3rd April 1766 he reported that the Parish of Scullogstown had

*3 Protestant families, 32 Popish do. The two popish priests who officiate in Kilcock officiate also in Cloncurry and Scullogstown.*<sup>14</sup>

In 1745 Revd. Josiah Hort, Archbishop of Tuam, purchased 868 acres in Scullogestown from the Fitzgeralds. He changed the name of the area to Hortland, although in Church of Ireland parish records it continued to be known as Scullogestown up to the latter part of the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> In 1748 he built a mansion using the stone from the old church which explains why not a trace of the old church remains.<sup>16</sup> In the Ordnance Survey Letters of 1837 P. O'Keeffe reported that:

*In Hortland Townland there is an old graveyard in which my informant said he saw the ruins of an old Church but of which not a vestige now remains. Beside the graveyard is a moat. In this Townland there was an old castle (beside the moat) which formerly belonged to the FitzGerald, but which they sold to Mr. Hort. None of it remains at present.*<sup>17</sup>

There is no saint associated with Scullogestown, but the patronal feast of the parish of Scullogestown was the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin or as it appears in the parochial register *Parochia Natae Virginis de Scullogestown*.<sup>18</sup> Patronal continuity was maintained in the parish when the first Newtown church built in the 1860s was conferred with the same dedication.<sup>19</sup> The Archbishop died in 1751 and it is unlikely he ever lived in his mansion. The first Hort to actually live in Hortland was Sir Josiah William Hort the 2nd Baronet who succeeded his father in 1807. He represented the county in Parliament in 1831-32. Sir William carried out certain changes to his estate. He resettled some of his tenants and workmen away from his house to a new settlement commonly known as the Street of Hortland.<sup>20</sup> It is probable too it was he who enclosed the graveyard with a railing and small gate. According to local tradition the graveyard for-

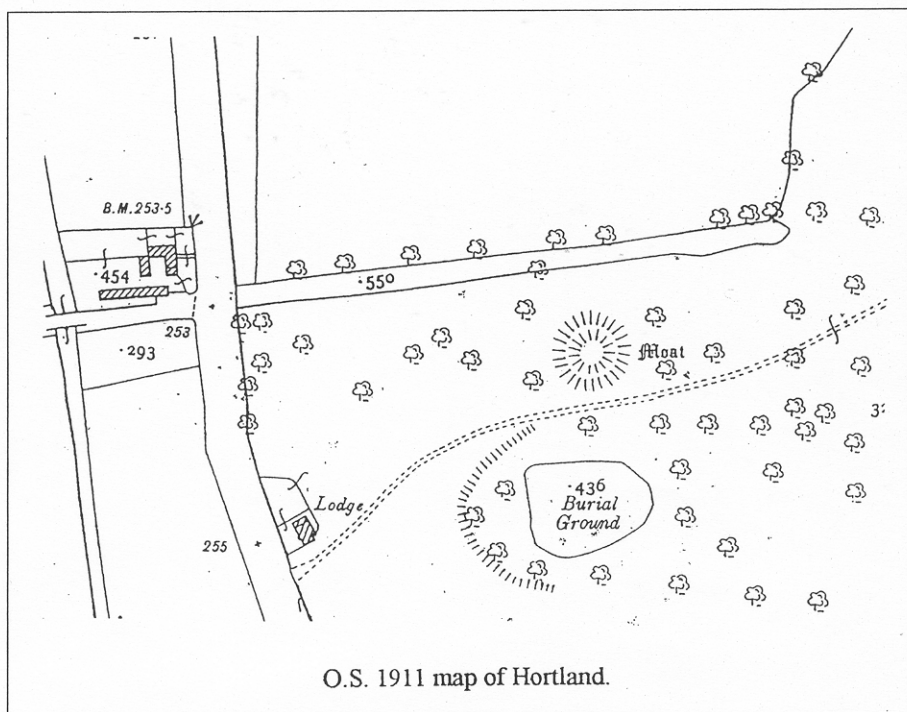
edge of this fertile upland they also built a motte which served as a lookout over the bog of Hortland. The dispossessed native Irish consigned to the verges of bogland posed a constant threat.

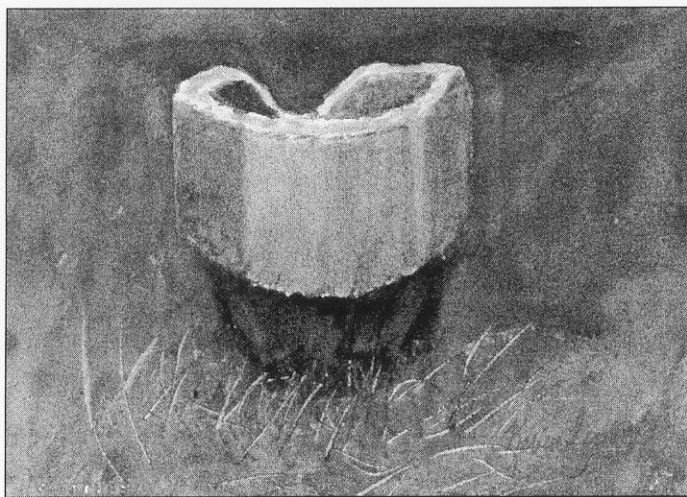
Lord Walter Fitzgerald described the motte in the early part of this century as a:

*sepulchral moat or tumulas not as large as most, but with a peculiar feature in being terraced. One terrace encircles the base, and another narrow terrace is about halfway up.*

He did not recall seeing a similar one anywhere else.<sup>29</sup> The motte is approximately seven metres in height and is surrounded at the base by a small fosse.<sup>30</sup>

An unusual feature of the church and graveyard at Hortland is that they are enclosed. Churches were not usually sited within Norman enclosures or baileys. To the west of the graveyard, facing the bog of Hortland is a deep ditch which could be considered a bailey. It peters out as it runs to the south. This possible defence mechanism was situated to the side of the most likely attack. There is also the possibility that the enclosure predates the Norman period and could be an early Christian enclosure. However, although there is no documentary evidence of early Christian history, there is the tentative link to the existence of a monastery from the place name (Baile na Scológ). As the Irish traditionally sought monastic cemeteries as their burial-places<sup>31</sup> it is probable





*Balyscullogue Font.*

*Painting K. Simms*

merly covered a larger area, but was reduced when enclosed by the railing.<sup>21</sup> In common with all old graveyards there are many unmarked graves, and several families from the Derry area would have buried their dead in Hortland.<sup>22</sup> After the Battle of Ovidstown in the 1798 Rebellion some bodies were

taken back by mules and buried just inside the gate which is also unmarked.<sup>23</sup> The earliest headstone inscription in Hortland belongs to Bryan McDonough who died on 24th February 1745 aged 95 years.

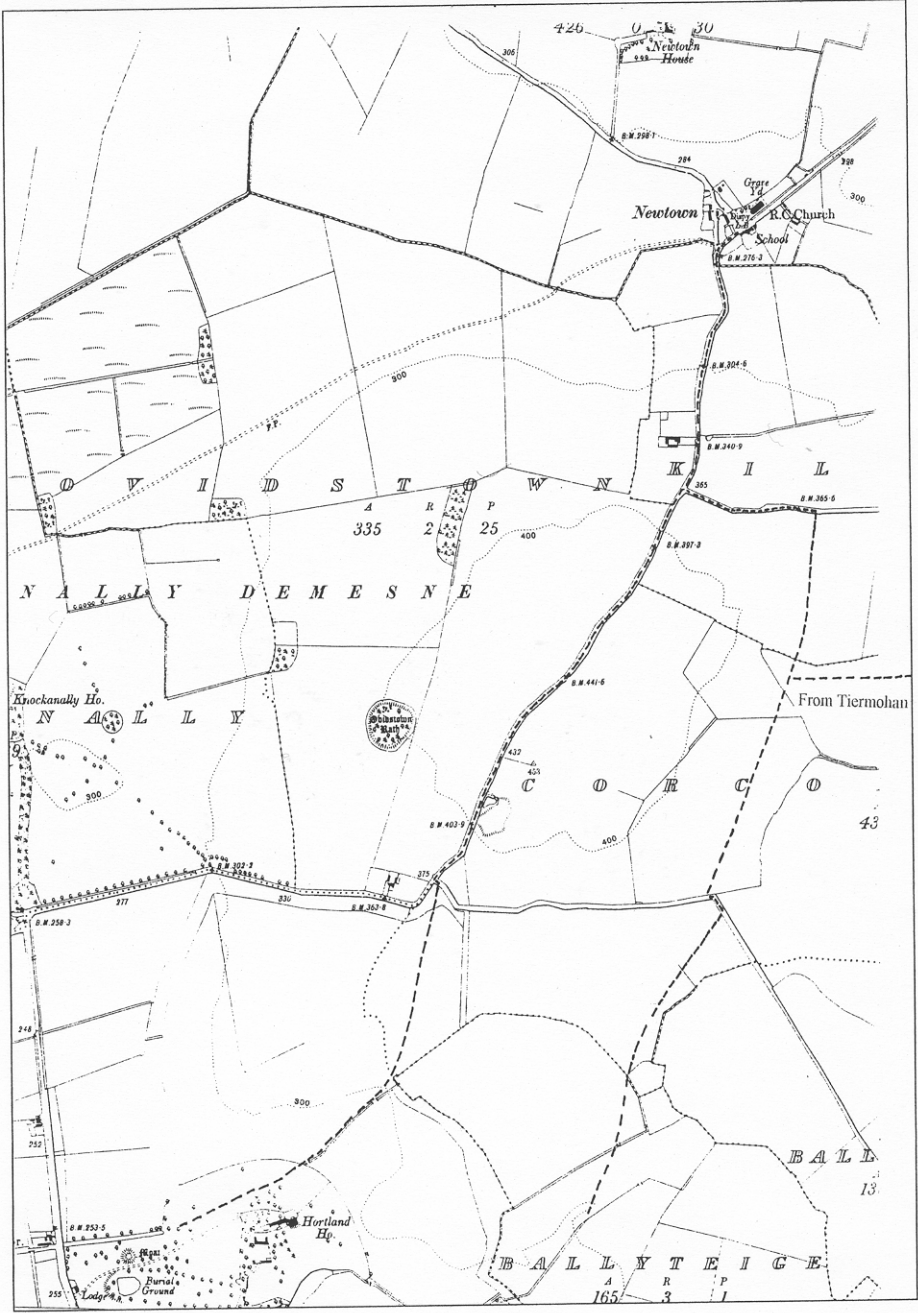
The only physical evidence of a church in Hortland which now remains is a baptismal font. Walter Fitzgerald a noted antiquarian described it as an *octagonal head of limestone font perforated in the centre*.<sup>24</sup> Its outer circumference is 72", diameter 24" and height 13".

By an act of Parliament in 1823 the method of collecting tithes was to be streamlined and paid in money rather than crops.<sup>25</sup> Liability was calculated according to the fertility of the land occupied. e.g. arable land was valued at 40 shillings per acre, wet moorey at 10s per acre and improved bog at 7s.6p. per acre. The results of this survey are contained in what is known as the *Tithe Applotment Books*. The total tithable area of the parish of Scullogestown was 543 acres 3 roods and 5 perches. Only William Hort and John Fitzpatrick possessed arable land, most of the rest had what was classified as improved bog, and the majority of the holdings were between one and five acres. In 1833 the survey for the parish of Scullogestown was carried out by Joseph Wyrant and amounted to £58.18s.11p. which was to be paid to the Rev. Charles Caulfield.<sup>26</sup> Although Kildare as a county did not suffer as severely as other counties in the Famine, this area with its impoverished land and small holdings was badly affected.<sup>27</sup>

### *Archaeology*

Teresa Brayton's phrase 'where bog and upland meet'<sup>28</sup> encapsulates the physical significance of this area. It probably explains why the Normans choose this strategically advantageous location to build their castle, church and possibly monastery. On the

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*Mass Paths*

that the enclosure boundary was the outer limits of a larger burial ground. This may have been the case in Hortland and is supported by local tradition that the burial ground eventually extended from the area surrounding the Church to the boundary bank of the 'bailey'.

(Note: A bailey was a circular shaped palisade enclosure built by the Normans beside a motte. The motte and bailey were built between the years of 1171 and 1250).

### *Mass-paths*

In the absence of a church in Hortland people from the area walked through fields to hear Mass in Newtown Church. These well trodden Mass-paths as they were called were also used by schoolchildren to attend school in Newtown. One Mass-path started close to the graveyard and followed the route which was the old back entrance to Hortland House. It exited at the gate which is now at the top of Barry's boureen. A second path from Ballyteige exited near Tom O'Brien's gate and recommenced at the gate into Dillon's field where it linked up with a Mass-path from Tiermohan and continued to Kilbride. Both groups then converged on the road leading into Newtown.<sup>32</sup>

A local committee formed in the early 1990s for the purpose of maintaining the graveyard has since disbanded. Kildare County Council will give small grants to local groups to help maintain graveyards. A small extension was added to the west side of the graveyard when Timothy Houlihan was interred in 1979. Since Seamus Cullen and Des O'Leary transcribed the headstones in 1995<sup>33</sup> the remains of three local families have been interred in Hortland. Mrs. Annie Yallop was interred on the 11th July 1995. Mrs. Christina Fennell on the 10th January 1998 and later in the same year her son Dinny. David Houlihan was interred on the 15th August 1998.

The topography of Hortland graveyard and its adjoining motte reveal physical evidence which suggest a rich and ancient history. With scant documentary evidence especially from the medieval period, a certain reliance on the physical evidence is inevitable. Although situated in a somewhat remote rural area it's clear Hortland was part of most of the major events in Irish history.



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