

St Patrick's Road

Armagh's lost ancient thoroughfare

by Kevin Quinn

I have wonderful childhood memories of fishing and swimming with my cousins on the stretch of the Callan River that flows between the Killylea and Nursery Road bridges. On many occasions we would stray off the river, making our way up the fields to the overgrown hedge grove that was sandwiched between two banks just below St. Patrick's Well. There we would play Cowboys and Indians swinging off branches and sliding down the hedge grove's steep west bank. However, it wasn't until quite recently during a casual conversation with Sean Barden (Armagh County Museum) on my childhood exploits on the Callan River that I discovered that these overgrown banks had been a surviving section of an ancient road known as St. Patrick's Road. According to tradition St Patrick had first come along this road on his mission to Armagh some 1500 years ago.

Local tradition

Until relatively recently, local people remembered June 29th as "Well Sunday" when many people walked out from the town to the well on the Eve of the Feast of St Peter and St Paul as it was believed that the water-level rose considerably on that night. The local tradition is that this was a place of pilgrimage from the introduction of Christianity to Ireland and that the well originated from St

Patrick striking the ground with his staff at that site, whilst on his way to Armagh to found his first church. It is also thought that the date of the pilgrimage is very suggestive of pre-Christian usage as it is near to midsummer.¹ The fact that two ancient thoroughfares converge at this site both coming from Emain Mhacha would go some way to support this suggestion.

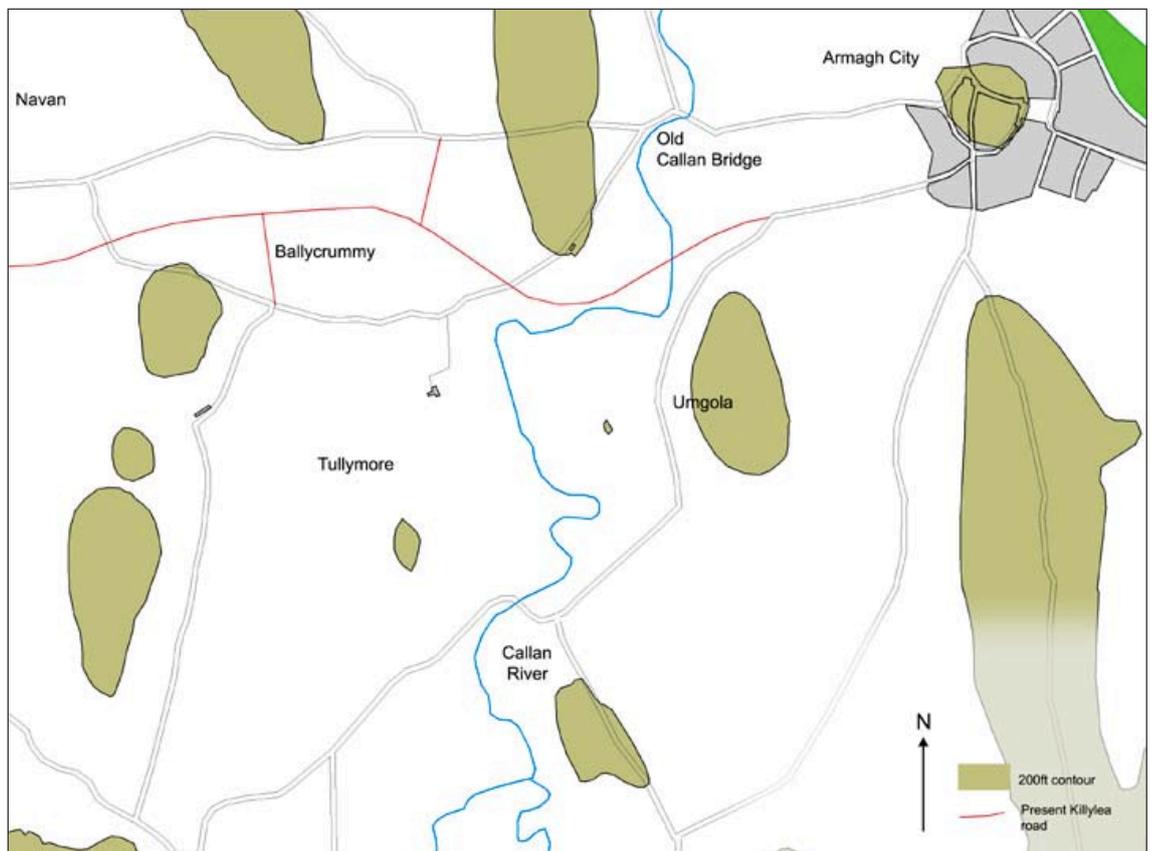
Location of Patrick's Road

The line of the ancient route west from Armagh to Emain Mhacha still exists (Callan Street, Windmill Hill, The old Callan Bridge, Legarhill, and Navan Fort Road). Patrick's Road was one of the two ancient roads that branched off the ancient west road. On the west side of the old Callan Bridge the Lurgyvallen

Road branched to the north and slightly further up the west road at the bottom of Legar Hill; Patrick's Road branched to the south. It then ran south-east of St Patrick's Well, making a south westerly loop slicing through the townlands of Ballycrummy and Tullymore, and skirting the northern boundary of the townland of Tullylost before joining the west road again just east of the Navan Fort.

Earliest sources

The earliest evidence for the existence of Patrick's Road is the 1601 Bartlett Pictorial Map of Armagh.² The Bartlett Map does show the west and north roads leaving the town but only shows very vaguely that part of Patrick's Road below St Patrick's Well. The 1760 Rocque's Map



Map showing topography and old roads, compiled from Rocque's 1760 map and various OS maps

of Armagh³ is the first map that depicts Patrick's Road in its entirety. Rocque's map clearly shows Patrick's Road leaving the west road at the bottom of Legarhill before looping out to the south west with the Ballyrath Road branching off to the south. Patrick's Road then swung north rejoining the west road near the Navan Fort. It does seem that by 1760 Patrick's Road was servicing Tullymore House (construction date unknown, demolished 1975) and Ballyrath House (constructed early 18th century, demolished in the late 1990's).

1834 Ordnance Survey map

The 1834 map is the first map that clearly shows the precise route taken by Patrick's Road before its demise caused by the construction of the new Killylea Road in 1840.⁴ By using the 1834 map it is possible to accurately trace Patrick's Road and establish the exact route it took between Legarhill and the Navan Fort. Patrick's Road began at the bottom of Legarhill just slightly east of St Patrick's Well. It then took more or less a direct south-west line cutting upwards to the top of Mullacreevie Hill. It then passed the northern side of a farm house that was sited on the top of Mullacreevie Hill. The road then descended the south west side of Mullacreevie Hill and basically ran parallel with the west road,



St. Patrick's Well, photographed May 2005

forming the boundary line between the townlands of Ballycrummy to its north and Tullymore and Tullylost to its south. Patrick's Road then looped to the North West eventually linking up again with the west road at the Navan Quarry. By 1834 Patrick's road was now servicing a third big house known as Rosebrook in the townland of Annaghboy. Rosebrook

House was probably constructed in the 1730s by the Rev. John Maxwell, a Presbyterian minister and is still occupied today.⁵ The avenue for Rosebrook branched off Patrick's Road just where it began its loop back towards the west road. However, according to Rocque's 1760 map Rosebrook House had previously been serviced by the old west road.

The New Line

By 1838 a new road was being planned between Armagh and Caledon. In the 1838 Summer Assizes sitting on Wednesday 25th July the Grand Jury decided that a new contract be adopted for the construction of this new road:

*"Robert Clarke and James Morrison, to make a new line of road leading from Caledon to Armagh, between the mearing dividing the Baronies of Armagh and Tureny and the City of Armagh."*⁶

At the same Summer Assizes William Dargan, contractor is awarded:

"The contract to execute all the masonry works on 1401 perches of the intended new road from Caledon to Armagh."

In the 1839 Lent Assizes the surveyor reported:

"I have no hesitation whatever in saying, that in making a road from Armagh to Caledon, the shortest line must be the best, and that expense should only form a passive ingredient in the consideration of the subject."

So, by 1842 the new road was open for traffic.

1864 Ordnance Survey map

The 1864 map clearly illustrates the line the new road took and how it affected Patrick's Road.⁷ Like Patrick's Road the new road runs basically parallel with the west road. The new Callan Bridge was constructed directly south of the old bridge to take the new road over the Callan River. The new road looped south-west cutting across Patrick's Road at the entrance to Tullymore House and just south of the Navan Quarry. At Tullymore, Patrick's Road lost the section between the farm house on the top of Mullacreevie Hill and the entrance to Tullymore Park. The probable reason



Looking south over the remains of the farmhouse on Mullacreevie hill

for the loss of this section and not the entire road reaching back to Legarhill is that the latter section serviced the farm house on the summit of Mullacreevie Hill. From the 1864 Griffiths Valuation the farm house was occupied by a John Ballentine.⁸ So therefore, maintaining access to the Ballantine house saved a short section of Patrick's Road for the time being. Another short section was also lost in Tullymore Park. The occupier of Tullymore House (Osborne Kidd) lengthened his avenue by incorporating a section of Patrick's Road in order to gain access to the new road. Osborne Kidd also abandoned the small section that ran up Tullymore Hill towards the Ballyrath crossroads. A fourth big house was constructed north of Tullymore House but with only direct access to the new road. Ballycrummy House was constructed between 1834 and 1864 probably after the completion of the new road, utilizing the benefits of the new thoroughfare. The other changes to Patrick's Road in 1864 were that it was now linked to the new road at Ballyrath and Rosebrook House closed its access to Patrick's Road and constructed a new avenue connecting it to the new road.

A case of trespass

In 1910 the Armagh Guardian reported on a court case from Armagh Petty Sessions.⁹ The headline read: "An Old Right of Way." It was reported that; "Robert Leeman, Navan, charged Miss Ellen McInerney with trespass on Legarhill. The trespass took place from St Patrick's Well to the gate near Compton's Factory." (Umgola Mill). The route that Miss McInerney took to work was by 1910 a disused section of Patrick's Road that stretched from just below St Patrick's Well to the old Ballentine farm house on the top of Mullacreevie Hill. The track then left Patrick's Road at the Ballentine farm house heading south towards the new road and Umgola Mill, crossing the Callan River by means of a worker's footbridge.

Mr. Peel representing the Plaintiff said; "That he (Mr. Leeman) did not object to people going to the well but there was no right of way across his land."

The case for the Plaintiff continued: "A Mr Tate, who had been in charge of the land for thirty years, until about five years ago, deposed to stopping people going across, including the defendant. He stopped them nine years ago till he left."

A Miss Stella Pearson from Legarhill said

on behalf of the defence: "That she had gone to Compton's factory across the hill for five years and had never been stopped and had gone in Mr. Tate's time."

The defence then called a Mr. Patrick Grimes aged 79 as an expert witness. Mr. Lavery for the defence described Mr. Grimes as, "That he (Mr. Grimes) knew more about Armagh than any living man." Mr. Grimes began, saying: "That he had lived all his life in Armagh and was for a time bailiff of the Quinn estate, in the townland of Lurgvallen beside Legarhill. The stile to allow people to go to St Patrick's Well was put up by Major Thornton in 1865. The new Killylea Road was made in 1839 and was ready for traffic in 1840, and there had been a right of way across the hill since 1845."

In cross-examination Mr. Grimes stated that: "He remembered the stile being built because he was at school with Cullen of Castle Street, son of the man who made the stile, at the time it was made."

Mr. Grimes continued saying: "Three stiles were made one above to the well and one below to enable people to cross to Compton's. The lower one was not now in use."

Mr. Lavery for the defense raised the question of title and also that the defendant had not been warned. Mr. Peel for the Plaintiff held that Tate having stopped people going across destroyed



The beginning of Patrick's Road (on the left) as it forks from the old road to Navan Fort (on the right).

any right of way there may have been. The bench held there was a question of title, and gave a dismiss without prejudice. The parties could go to the County Court, which would give title.

So it seems that by 1910 some seventy years after the construction of the new Killylea road, the Legarhill to Mullacreevie Hill section of Patrick's Road had been reduced to an overgrown track-way used as a short cut to work for some of the Umgola Mill workers.

1948 Ordnance Survey map

By 1948 Patrick's Road had basically ceased to exist north of the Killylea Road except for the short section at the foot of Legarhill.¹⁰ It was a similar case for the section in Tullymore Park. Only the section that had become part of the avenue still carried the traffic coming and going from Tullymore House. However, the section stretching from Oliver's farm to the Navan road junction was still in regular use with mostly agricultural traffic.

Surviving sections of Patrick's Road

Within the past few years the new housing development of St. Patrick's Park has erased any trace of the section of road which was just south west of St.Patrick's Well. However, a substantial section of this ancient road is still traceable and with some sections still in use. A short section at the very beginning of Patrick's Road, just where it branches off of the old west road at the bottom of Legarhill provides access for two houses. A row of four hawthorne trees on the north east side of the remains of the old Ballentine farm house at the top of Mullacreevie Hill shows the line the road took before descending the hill heading towards Tullymore. The road can further be traced on the north-west side of the old Tullymore House Avenue, stretching over Tullymore Hill towards the Ballyrath road. The laneway leading from Oliver's farm house to the Ballyrath road is another section of Patrick's Road that is still in regular usage. The largest surviving section of the road basically runs

parallel with the Killylea Road between the Ballyrath turn off and the left turn off on the opposite side of the Navan Fort junction. This section is totally overgrown except for a short section that provides access to the Killylea road for several houses. The last surviving section is at the end of Patrick's Road. This section is in constant use as it is part of the national road system linking the Killylea

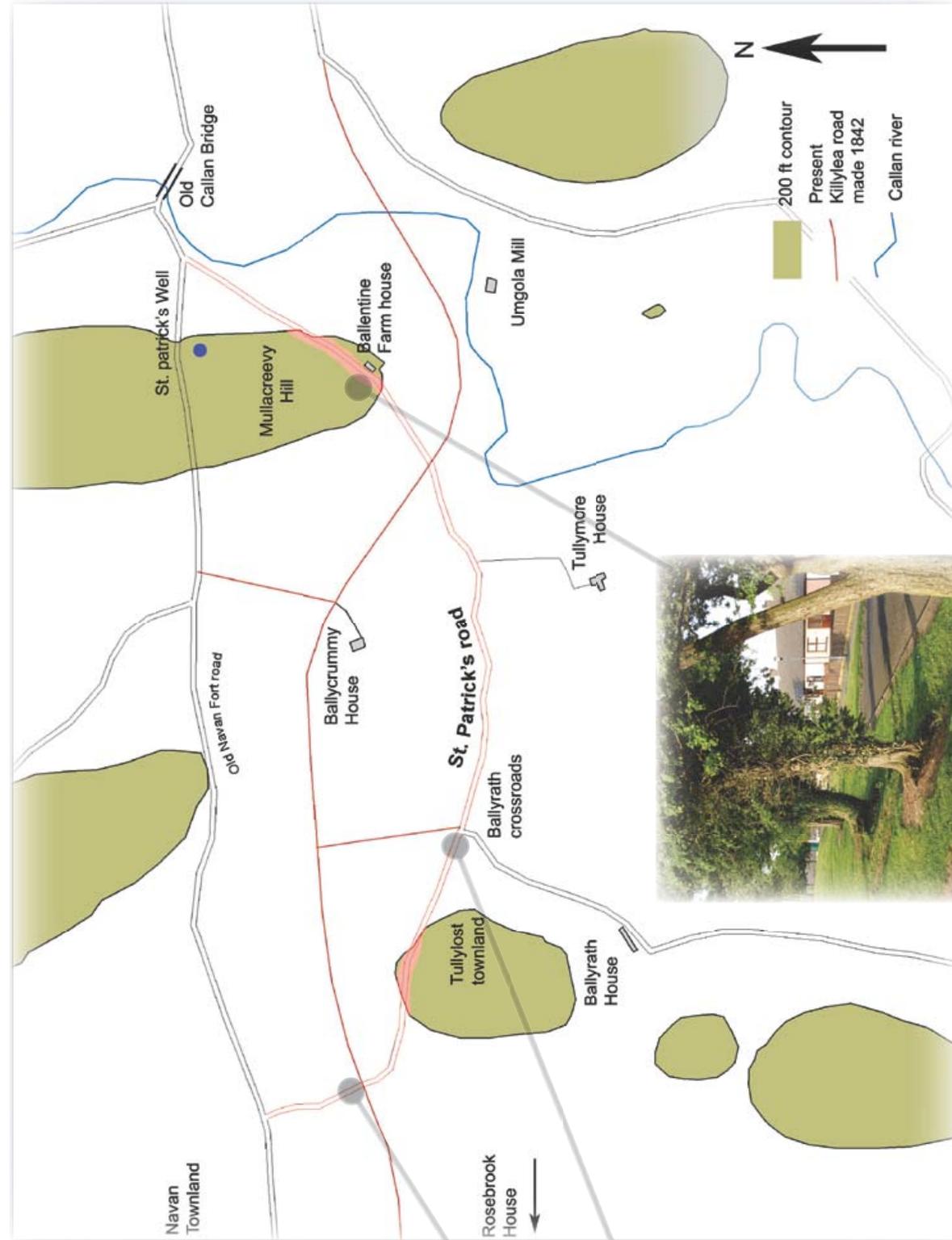
and the Navan Fort roads. So it is quite remarkable that a road with probable Iron Age origins and with such a celebrated tradition (even if that tradition has been lost due to the passage of time) is still meeting the commuting needs of Armachians some 2000 years later.

References

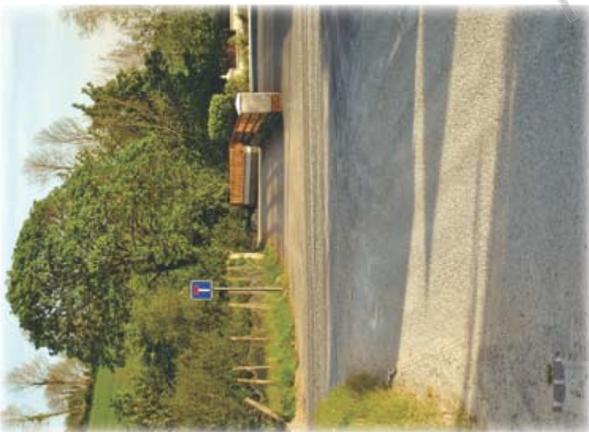
- 1 T.G.F. Paterson, *Armachiana*. Vol.14, Armagh County Museum
- 2 G.A. Hayes-McCoy, *Ulster and Irish Maps c.1600*. (ed) Irish Manuscripts Commission, Dublin. 1964
- 3 John Rocque, Plan of Armagh from his County map.1760
- 4 Ordnance Survey Map, 6inch = 1 mile, County Armagh, Sheet 12, 1834.
- 5 Stuart, J. *Historical Memoirs of Armagh*, 1819, p419
- 6 Grand Jury Presentments, Summer Assizes, 1838 &1839
- 7 Ordnance Survey Map, 6inch = 1 mile, County Armagh, Sheet 12, 1864.
- 8 Griffith's Valuation map of Armagh, Sheet 12.
- 9 Armagh Guardian, 1910 (Courtesy of The Irish and Local Studies Library)
- 10 Ordnance Survey Map, 6 inch = 1 mile, County Armagh, Sheet 12, 1948.



Traces of the road still visible as the indentation running along the top of the field in Tullymore Park



(Above) Map showing route of St. Patrick's road in 1834



Row of Hawthorns mark the line of road at Mullacreevy