

Kilruane graveyard

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This contribution to **Folklore Focus** records folk beliefs attached to the graveyard beside Kilruane medieval church.

KILRUANE CHURCH (TN015-098---)

The name of Kilruane townland, 5km north-east of Nenagh town, Co. Tipperary, is an Anglicisation of *Cill Ruadháin*, 'the church of St Rodanus'. Within the townland is Kilruane medieval church, now in ruins and overgrown; beside it is a Protestant church that was constructed in 1820. The National Folklore Collection contains several accounts of supernatural occurrences that took place at Kilruane church and graveyard. The

following folktale was collected from Thomas Ryan in the 1930s:

'In the parish of Kilruane there is a churchyard known as the Kilruane Churchyard. There many things in the form of ghosts [are] seen ...

One night a man was coming home from rambling. It was a dark night and he could not see anything. When he came to the churchyard a strange feeling came over him and he was hardly able to walk. He came along all right till he came to the stile. Just as he was passing the stile a big black dog came out to him. The dog had his tongue hanging out and when the man looked at him a ball of fire fell out of its mouth. The man was frightened but he kept going on, and the dog kept following him. He went along all right and every time he would look at the dog a ball of fire used to come out of its mouth. The man and the dog kept going on until they came to a little grove on the side of the lane. There was a stile there and in a bit in the field there was a little grove. When the dog reached the stile he got in and went towards the grove. When the dog was gone the strange feeling went off the man but when the dog was gone a

couple of minutes he thought he heard all the trees in the grove falling. The people that heard of this say it was the devil' (NFCS 0533:361-2; <https://www.duchas.ie/ga/cbes/4922133/4855162/5011523>).

Another story, collected by schoolboy Seán O Méara from his parents, told of two boys who stopped off at Kilruane graveyard after they had been collecting nuts. They sat on one of the graves and began dividing up the cache. Two policemen passing by overheard the boys and thought that it was the devil counting out the souls he had gathered (NFCS 0533:237; www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/4922133/4855037/5010393).

Multiple folktales about supernatural events and malevolent beings (particularly the devil) are recorded about Kilruane, yet other church and graveyard sites in the area have no such associations. This pattern is found with other archaeological site types. For instance, in townlands with multiple ringforts, folktales are typically associated with just one monument, even if all are generally avoided or left undisturbed. This leads us to wonder why a particular site or monument was singled out in this way while equivalent sites were largely ignored. **AI**

Right: The overgrown ruins of Kilruane medieval church in the centre, with the early nineteenth-century Protestant church to the left (James Bonsall, Fourth Dimension Prospection Ltd).

