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Dunisky, Co. Cork: A Refuge Souterrain?

By J. P. McCARTHY



Ill. 1. Aerial photograph (dated 28 May 1981) of Dunisky and surrounding landscape, including 'Mausoleum', courtesy of Dr Daphne Pochin Mould

The townland of Dunisky (*Dún Uisce*, 'water fort', see Ó Murchadha 2001, 98) is situated about 2.5 miles to the SE of Macroom, Co. Cork (Ill. 1). It is also the Civil Parish of Dunisky, and is located in the Barony of West Muskerry. In extent, it contains over one thousand acres. It was first surveyed by the Ordnance Survey of Ireland in 1841-42. An earlier survey of the townland survives, drawn by the Cork cartographer, Patrick Aher. It is dated 1791, and shows sub-denominations.

In part, the townland's landscape overlaps a north-west-/south-east-running ridge, which stretches down towards the waters of the River Lee on the north side and towards a broad, flat, east-sweeping plain drained by the Buingea river on the south. The plain links through the Lissardagh glen to the valley of the Bride river, which stretches eastwards towards Cork city like a long corridor. An intriguing place-name in the townland is *Móinteán na gCloigíonn* ('meadow of the skulls') which John Lyons (1893, 211; see

also Ó Murchadha 2002) suggests was a battle site. During the nineteenth century, the plain at Dunisky was used for point-to-point races. These were enthusiastically reported in the press by Mr Charles Beamish, who said of the plain, perhaps colourfully, 'a better race course there cannot be and the view of every part of it is complete from a conical hill which rises from the winning post, a natural amphitheatre large enough to accommodate 20,000 spectators and enable them to see distinctively every movement from every horse' (Galvin 1997, 6-7). The site of the souterrain overlooks this plain. Beamish, who was an engineer, lived at De La Cour villa, a residence in the townland, beside which a steep rising country road leaves the Beamish Line and climbs to a crossroads on the brow of the ridge. Bounded by this road on the west, and on the north by that coming from the east, is a field in which there is a tall tower-like structure known as the 'Beamish Mausoleum' (Fig. 1). It stands in

what was once a graveyard, which is shown on the first-edition six-inch Ordnance Survey maps. No immediately obvious evidence for the graveyard survives today. At the base of the tower, it is possible to identify an earthen platform which extends east/west. This is possibly the site of a church indicated by a reference to Dunisky in the Cork Decretal letter of 1199 (Ó Murchadha 2001, 98). Another indicator of a church presence is a small stone plaque situated on the western roadside bank which was erected in the early 1960s by the Kilmurry Historical Society. It refers to *Teampall Achadh Dá Eo* ('church of the field of the two yew trees'). Below ground, close to the south side of the mausoleum, is where the souterrain is located (Power *et al.* 1997, monument no. 8884). There is no documentary evidence, of which I am aware, to link this site with the townland name, i.e. with the *dún* of Dunisky.

The part of the townland in which these structures are situated lies on the south side

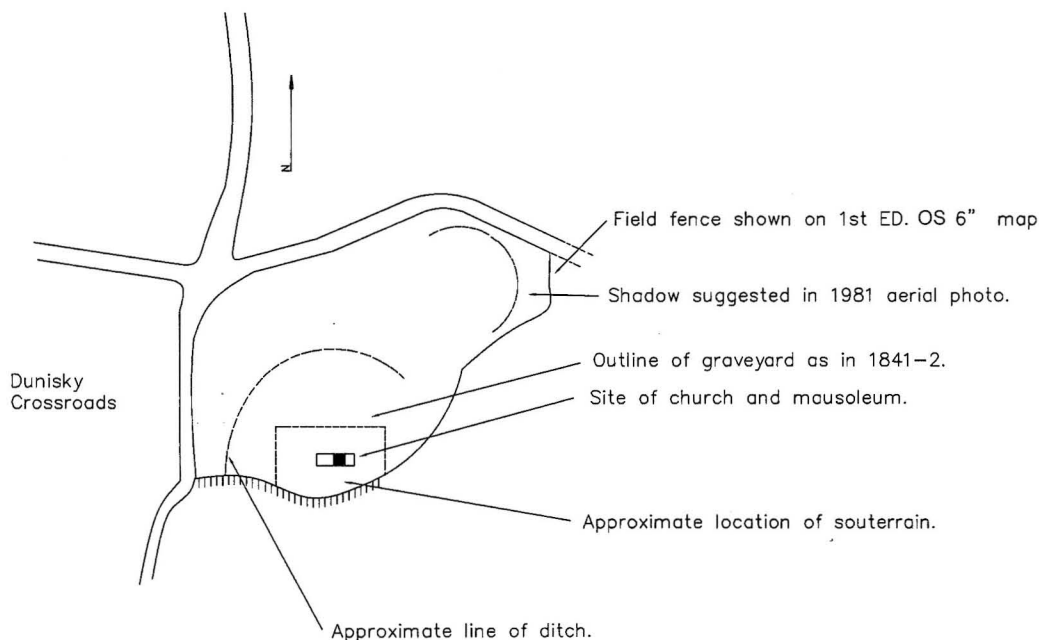


Fig. 1. Author's sketch of site features (not to scale)

of the ridge where there is a distinctive hillock, the south face of which has an escarpment-like slope which tapers off to the east. By walking the ground and from an aerial photograph, it is possible to trace the outline of a ditch starting at this slope at a point a few metres inside the field bank on the west. It then curves around to the north and, according to local knowledge, ends at a point on the east side where the escarpment tapers off. The impression given is that the natural features of the site's setting have been enhanced to exploit its defensive possibilities in relation to the Dunisky plain. It has commanding vistas to the east and south over what could have been a wooded, or partly wooded, landscape. Its position on the ridge beside a crossroads is indicative of a meeting place. From the crossroads one obtains a remarkable panoramic view to the north and west over the Lee valley and on to the West Cork/Kerry mountains. There is an unusual zigzag in the roadway which approaches the crossroads from the east. This has been a feature of the roadway for a long time, being visible on Patrick Aher's 1791 maps. An aerial photograph (Ill. 1), taken by Dr Daphne Pochin Mould (28 May 1981), shows a curving shadow in the field defined within the zigzag. It is tempting to view the zigzag as being the result of the roadway, at some point in time, accommodating a pre-existing topographical feature. It is of further interest that the first-edition Ordnance Survey map shows a field fence running south from the eastern stretch of the zigzag, paralleling the western stretch. This fence runs to the base of the south-facing escarpment and has two arcs in it, as if to suggest two parts to the site. I am uncertain as to whether or not this is the same fence shown in the aerial photograph, or perhaps a somewhat altered version of it. Amalgamating information from various sources suggests interesting archaeological excavation possibilities.

DUNISKY IN HISTORICAL RECORDS

These records speak of two castles. One is a de Cogan 'castle', existing somewhere in the townland in 1261, when it was 'burned' down by the army of Finghin Mac Carthy. Richard de Cogan, nephew of Milo, made settlements in the Muskerry region sometime after 1207, one of which was presumably Dunisky, winning the land for such settlements at the point of the sword. The politically turbulent context of the Norman occupation of south-west Munster in which Dunisky existed during the thirteenth century has been described by Ó Murchadha (1961). The other castle is said to have been built by the Mac Carthys and was most probably a tower-house, i.e. built sometime from the mid-fifteenth century onwards.

What kind of structure was the thirteenth-century 'castle'? Features such as its physical setting, its vistas and its potential relationship to a ridge route-way may have offered a strong argument for the church site as having the most strategic location at which to create a fortress, particularly when the objective was to establish a sallypoint for a garrison from which to initiate a conquest and settlement of surrounding lands.

From the Cork Decretal Letter of 1199, we know that there was an ecclesiastical site at Dunisky at that time (Ó Murchadha 2001, 98). Is this the site we now know as the *Teampall Achadh Dá Eó* church site? If so, then were the church and a surrounding enclosure incorporated into a de Cogan settlement? Such would open up the possibility that the souterrain is pre-Norman. This, however, would not exclude the chance that the design could be non-native. Should we presume that the church design, and that of associated contemporary structures, was solely indigenous in origin? Could the church be a Norman construction (Hurley 1979)? Was the souterrain intended to serve a church and associated community? Or did

it serve a fortress, and its community, of which the church had become a part? If not, then, are the untold histories of the church and of the de Cogan 'castle' two separate, non-interacting, entities in the history of a land division which became both a townland and a parish?

For 1437, a church at Dunisky is mentioned in a tax list (Bolster 1972, 331). In 1615, a Royal Visitation recorded 'Nulla Ecclesia, nulla cancella, nullum servitium' at Dunisky (Brady 1863, v.1, 310). In 1693, the church is mentioned in a list of returns on the state of the Diocese of Cork and Ross. The entry, in the column titled 'Eccliarum Status', appears to indicate that the church was not in service (Brady 1863, v.1, xxiii). In 1750, Charles Smith, in his history of Cork, does not mention the church, although he does refer to the 'hospitality stone' which is elsewhere in the townland (Smith 1893, 168). The church is represented on two of the set of Dunisky estate maps by Patrick Aher, i.e. on the index map and one of the sub-denomination maps. In 1837, Lewis, in his *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, states that the remains of the old church 'were to be found on rising ground about a mile and a half from Warrenscourt'. The remains of the church, he says, show it to have been a small building. In 1841-42, the survey work for the first edition of the Ordnance Survey six-inch map records Dunisky church in ruins, as well as Beamish's tomb and a graveyard. The graveyard is shown as a rectangular enclosure, with the church in the centre. In the Ordnance Survey Name Books, the following description of the site is given: 'the ruins of Duniskey church exhibit an oblong figure 40 x 20 ft. The foundation only is visible except a portion of the NE angle of the wall, 4 ft long and 8 ft high which is free standing. Attached to this is a green spot about 1.5 chains long and 1 broad apparently a graveyard of old but now quite out of use. Some

would call this the church of Aghadoe as belonging to that diocese but the first name is more universal'.

According to John Lyons (1893, 211), the ruins of the church of Aghadoe stood at Dunisky until about 1852-53. Griffith's Valuation of 1852 shows Charles Beamish as the owner of a large portion of land in Dunisky parish. The valuation lists the graveyard as 20 perches in area. Charles Beamish died in 1867 and is said to have been placed in the mausoleum (MacCarthy 1970, 8). In 1896, the Ordnance Survey twenty-five-inch map describes Beamish's tomb as a 'mausoleum'. The Name Books for this revision describe it as a 'prominent tower-like structure erected as a mausoleum by a Mr. Beamish a former proprietor in the district'. In 1901, the second edition of the six-inch map shows the church as a symbol and also the mausoleum. A graveyard is not identified. In 1930, members of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society paid a visit to the site. No trace of the church or graveyard was visible. They were told that a late landowner had destroyed all vestiges of the church and graveyard.

The historical records speak of what was deemed notable in the townland in the eighteenth century, i.e. Smith or his respondents in 1750, Charles Etienne Coquebert de Montbret in 1790 (Ní Chinnéide 1974, 23). Neither church nor souterrain enters these topographical commentaries.

The historical sources illustrate selective aspects of the physical and social landscape during the later years of the eighteenth century, i.e. the Aher estate maps at the Cork Archives Institute. Though the church (now dilapidated and in ruins?) is shown, would the souterrain have been indicated if known?

The records indicate a certain amount of activity at the site during the nineteenth century, such as the construction of the mausoleum and associated site preparation works.

Charles Beamish was active in work schemes in the locality, for instance the Beamish Line. Could the excavation of an underground folly have also been a project? Might the rock extracted have been used in some other project? If so, why did no folk memory surface during the 1930 discovery, given that one hundred years or less had passed since the building of the mausoleum?

Sources tell us about happenings in the twentieth century and about an amazing underground discovery. The souterrain was located by accident in 1927 by a boy hunting rabbits with a ferret. Following the ferret through a small hole, he made his way into the souterrain. It was necessary to chisel away an opening to get him back out. The site was later investigated by the local CID, suspicious that it might have been in use as an arms dump. Explosives were employed to create an enlarged entry point. On 19 August 1930, L. S. Gogan investigated it on behalf of the National Museum of Ireland, accompanied by a newspaper reporter. The souterrain was described as 'unique in extent'. A full report with sketch plan appeared in the *Cork Examiner* on 20 August 1930 (p. 10). Vice-Admiral Boyle T. Somerville visited the same day as Gogan, and a brief mention of the discovery was made by J. J. Fitzgerald in this *Journal* for that year. I visited and surveyed the souterrain in October 1976 in the course of work for a master's thesis on the souterrains of County Cork (McCarthy 1977).

THE SOUTERRAIN

Geology and construction

The site is totally rock-cut (Fig. 2). The bedrock is Old Red Sandstone. The strike of the rock is NS. The upper levels possess a marked slaty cleavage. The lower levels do not exhibit this feature. Therefore, in some chambers of this souterrain, it was possible to excavate by breaking along the cleavage lines. This made the work easy in compari-

son to the amount of effort required to chip into the more densely structured rock. The majority of the chambers, excluding Chamber 3, are cut in such a way that their long axes are aligned with the direction of the strike of the rock. This results in some walls having smooth surfaces. Chambers 2 and 6 are very roughly cut and, as suggested below, may have been intended for use only as storage rooms in the event of the souterrain being occupied. Apart from Chamber 3 and Chamber 4, floor levels fall from N to S.

The site was created by digging three vertical shafts from the surface, all within a few metres of the south wall of the platform which I presume was the church site. Whether or not the church was extant at the time is another matter. A collapsed passage leading from Chamber 1 may lead to further chambers, in which case other shafts may await discovery. Only Chambers 2 to 3 and Chambers 5 to 6 do not have an excavation shaft as a backdrop to the creepways which join them. From the bottom of an excavation shaft, the option exists to tunnel in at least four directions. The maximum used at Dunisky is three, as at the junction of Chambers 4, 3 and 5. The method of closing off the tunnel opes at the bottom of an excavation shaft was by dry walling, and on top of this, the shaft was then refilled to the surface with soil. Ope sizes range from 70 cm to 1 m wide and 40 cm to 1.20 m high, depending, perhaps, on the intended chamber height or the depth of shaft relative to rock mantle level. Apart from the height variation, the kink in the passage joining Chambers 2 to 3 may indicate a slight miscalculation by excavators attempting to break through from either side. In terms of levels, there is a significant fall in floor level from north to south, possibly to allow for seepage water run-off from Chambers 4 to 7. Ceiling levels were perhaps determined by this fall, by the surface contours and by the rock textures visible in the excavation

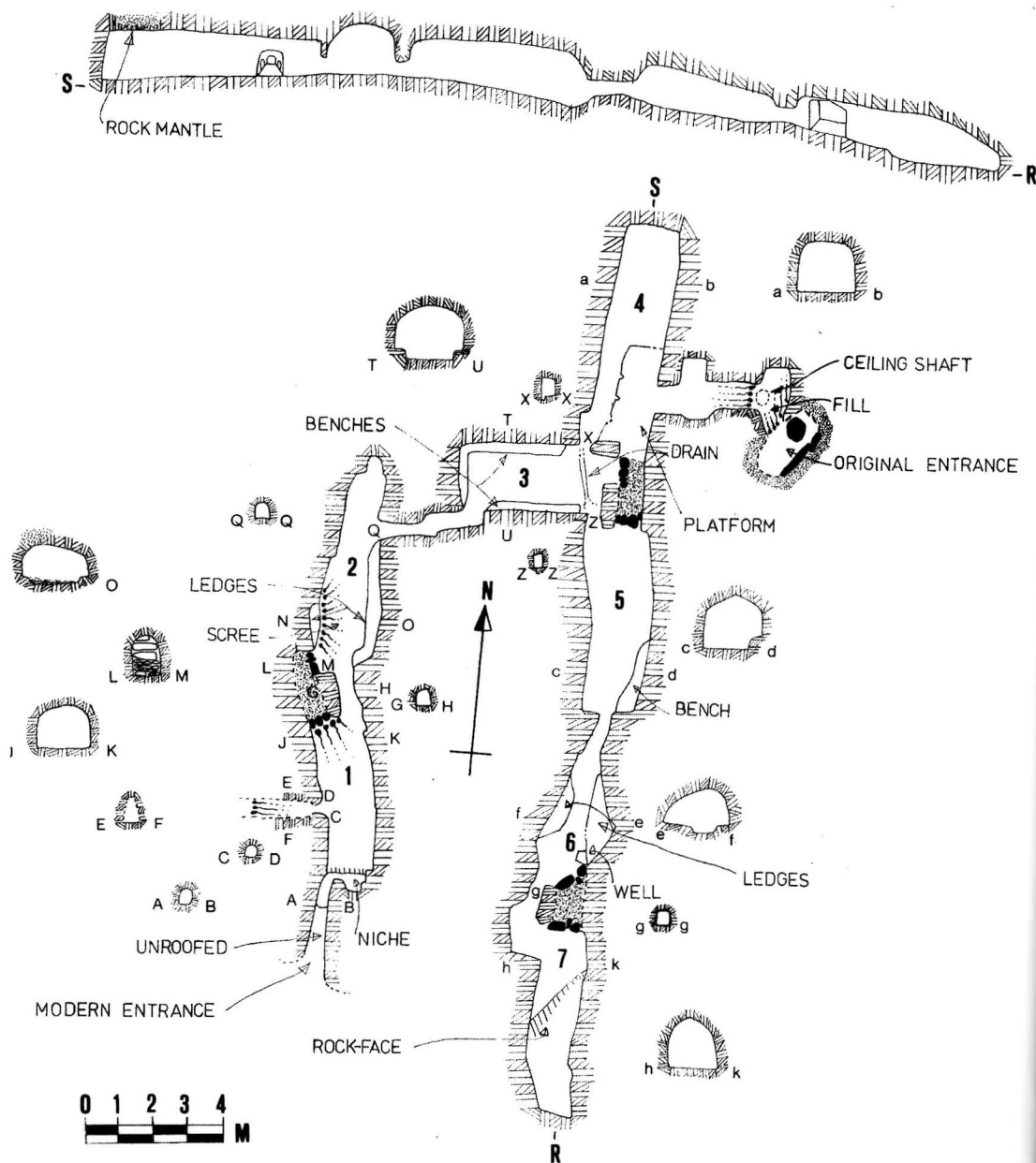


Fig. 2. Author's survey and drawing of Dunisky souterrain in 1976, with chambers (1-7) numbered in bold

shaft wall faces. The ceiling in Chamber 3 is of much interest in that one can see the imprints of the chisel blade – perhaps 11 cm wide – which cut it. It has a barrel-vaulted shape. In Chamber 5, the ceiling is chipped into an arch, making for a stylish visual from Chamber 3.

What tools were used? A wooden mallet, coal-chisel forerunner and hand pick, perhaps. A mallet head found by Gogan inside Chamber 1 (Fig. 3) was suggested by him to be modern, and may have been introduced when the boy who rediscovered the site was chiselled out. In what is an impressive piece of underground engineering, of tunnelling work, more than 90 cubic metres of rock were extracted through the shafts before the opes to the chambers were sealed. Subsidence over the centuries and collapse of drystone walls has created those surface depressions which indicate the whereabouts of the souterrain today.

PRINCIPAL STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS

The site has at least seven chambers. The 'H'-shaped core plan consists of two parallel runs of chambers with a cross chamber (Chamber 3) between them. The modern entrance is located about midway along the top edge of the escarpment. It consists of a long narrow tunnel unroofed for a distance of 1.6 m at the S end and, at the N end, roofed for a distance of 80 cms leading into the top of Chamber 1. I have numbered the chambers from today's entrance rather than from the original, as this was the manner of recording them. Gogan's approach was similar.

The chambers

The long axis of Chamber 1 is orientated NS (Ill. 2). It is sub-rectangular in plan and has a barrel vault-style ceiling. On the west side of the chamber, at floor level, a creephole with a very small diameter (25 cm) enters a passage with a collapse at the inner end. I was

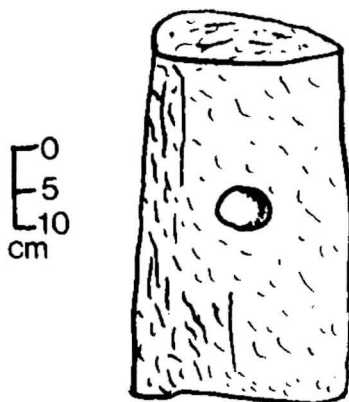
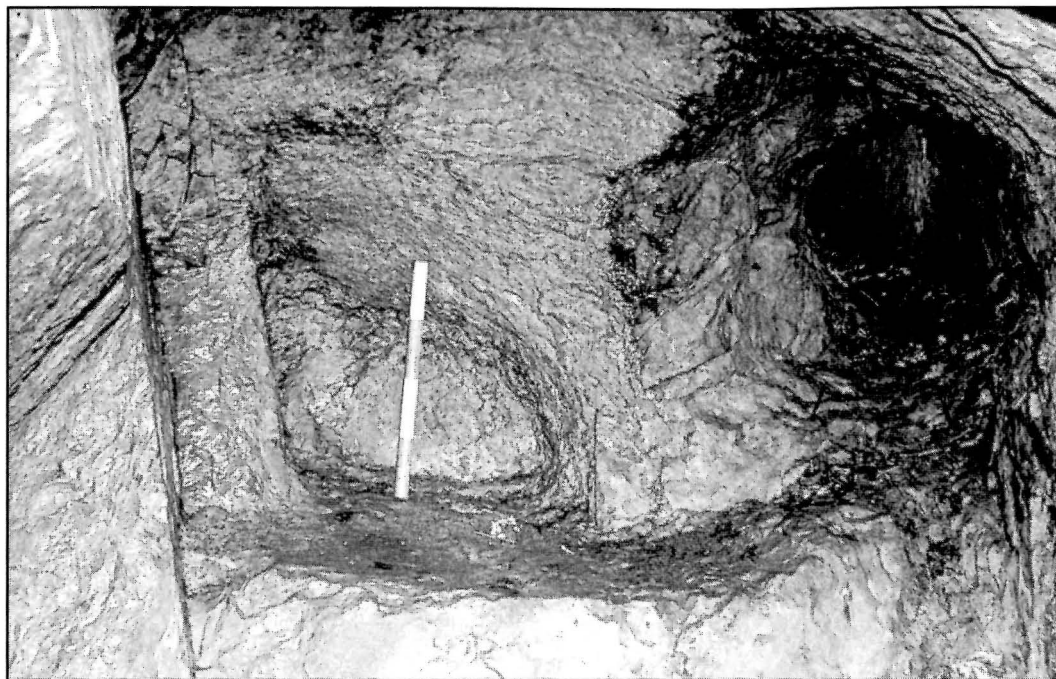


Fig. 3. Wooden mallet, found 1930
(after L. S. Gogan)

unable to squeeze through into this. Gogan's plan shows a small circular chamber at the end of the passage, which the 1930 report says it was not possible to examine. At the NW corner of the chamber, the dry walling of the excavation shaft ope has collapsed, resulting in a soil spill into the chamber. The lowest point of the floor is at the centre of the chamber. The floor rises to the N from there to a creepway to Chamber 2.

Chamber 2 (Ill. 3) has what could be described as an elongated wedge-shaped plan, and is orientated NS. It narrows significantly to the N. It is very roughly cut, and appears to be closer to the surface than Chamber 1. The ceiling is higher at the W and slants to the E, this being indicative of the method of its excavation from the shaft ope, which is at the SW of the chamber. It consists of six courses of dry walling, of which the upper three are of large blocks of stone. The ope is 70 cm wide and 1.15 m high. At 3.30 m from the SE corner of the chamber, a creepway runs E to Chamber 3.

Chamber 3 (Ill. 4) is oriented EW, rectangular in plan and has a barrel vault-style ceiling. The chamber is cut across the strike of the rock. The wall faces are well finished. The marks of the chisel head are visible on the ceiling. The floor is roughly level. At the



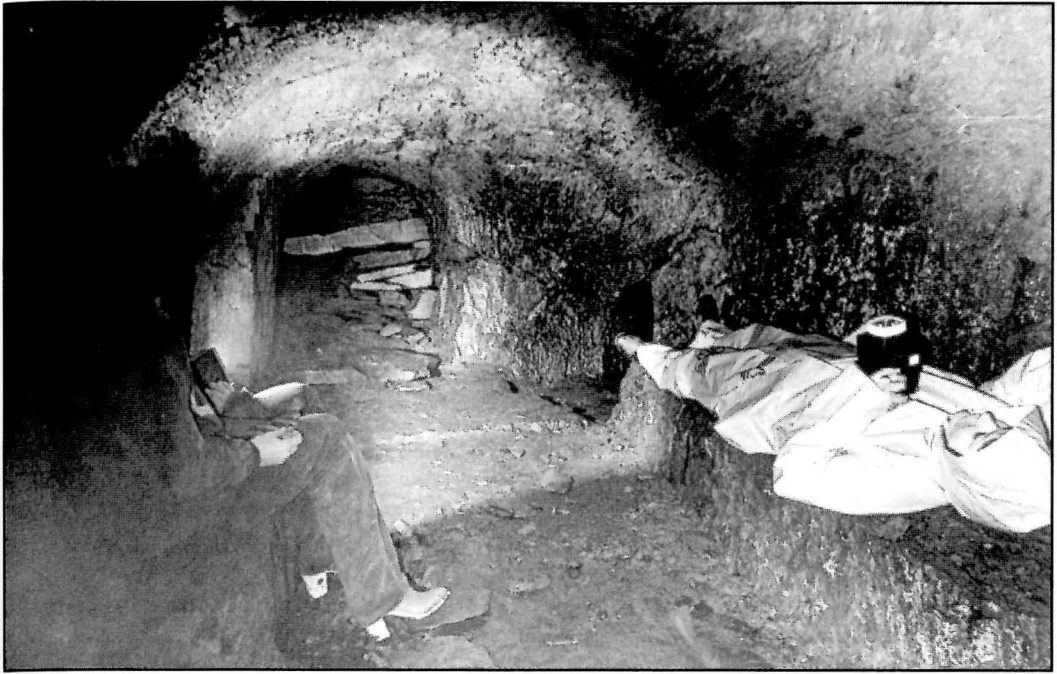
Ill. 2. Dunisky souterrain, Chamber 1, south end, showing shelf, niche and modern entrance shaft at right.

E end is the excavation shaft. Much of the stone work is now missing, and it is possible to see into Chamber 4 and also to the back of the dry walling closing the ope in Chamber 5. Opes are arched. The dry walling is constructed behind rather than within them. That in Chamber 3 is 75 cm wide and 1.10 m high. At the SE corner of the chamber is a short creephole to Chamber 5. At the NE corner is a small opening, broken in the base of the wall, which gives access to Chamber 4, where a slight wall recess facilitates access/egress through the opening.

Chamber 4 is a long chamber, oriented NS with a rectangular plan, a level floor, barrel vault-style ceiling and even-surfaced walls. It is the longest of the chambers, and in a three-dimensional sense, the most roomy. The NE end of the chamber is cut close to the surface. At the SE, some stone slabs

from the excavation shaft walling are scattered on the floor. At 1.00 m from the S end of the chamber in the E wall is the entrance to a long passage rising upwards to the E. This leads to the original entrance compartments. In the SW corner is the creephole to Chamber 3. Two pieces of furnace bottom were found there.

Chamber 5 (Ill. 5) is orientated NS, has a rectangular plan and an arched-style ceiling. The excavation shaft wall is at the NE end, and measures 80 cm wide by 1.20 m high. The floor level slopes gradually to the centre of the chamber and then steeply to the south, creating a depression in the floor below the creepway entrance at the S end. This depression (basin?) fills naturally with seepage water. The bottom of the 'basin' is about 70 cm below the floor level of Chamber 3. The ceiling is arched with a distinct pitch. Walls are straight with smooth sur-



Ill. 3. Dunisky souterrain, Chamber 2 (from south end), showing ledge and ceiling dip

faces and with a slight E to W bend in the chamber's NS axis. At the S end is the creepway to Chamber 6. It is 45 cm above floor level and has a long creepway.

Chamber 6 has a more pronounced wedge-shaped plan than Chamber 2. Similarly, it is roughly cut. It has very low walls and a barrel vault-style ceiling. There is a gradual southward slope in the floor. At the SE side, the ceiling slopes down to meet the floor, forming a cleft-like space. At the SE is the excavation opening. At the SW corner is the creepway to Chamber 7.

Chamber 7 is rectangular in plan, with a slight twist to the SE at one end. Its orientation is NS. At 1.8 m from the N wall, the floor drops 30 cms, due to the nature of the bedding plane in the rock. At the S end of the chamber there is clay on the floor. The ceiling in this part of the chamber slopes down to the floor, and clay occupies a nar-

row cleft between floor and ceiling. At the N end of the chamber is the dry walling of the excavation shaft, the only one in the souterrain which is intact.

Linking devices: creepholes and creepways

The souterrain contains four creepways, which are low narrow passages between chambers that require a person to stomach-crawl from one end to the other. They are usually fairly level. A creephole is a shorter version; there are three of these in the souterrain, i.e. at Chambers 3 to 4, 3 to 5, and leading from the west wall of Chamber 1.

Unlike the creepways elsewhere in the souterrain, that between Chamber 3 and Chamber 2 has some interesting differences. It is in two lengths. In the first of these, i.e. that from Chamber 2, it rises 50 cm over a distance of 1.6 m, and is 45 cm wide and 45 cm high. It then enlarges significantly, going



Ill. 4. Dukiskey souterrain, Chamber 3 (from west end), showing benches, ceiling, excavation shaft ope, creephole to Chamber 5 and floor 'drainage' channel.

from 90 cm high to 1.40 m where it enters the SW of Chamber 3. It is as though the intention was to provide space for a person standing in this room to stoop down to enter the creep. In Chamber 2, a person would already have been in a crouched position because of the chamber height, and consequently a similar modification to the creepway was not necessary. A comparable situation also exists at the creepway between Chambers 6 and 7. Like Chamber 2, Chamber 6 has a low ceiling, and one needs to crouch to move around. However, at the Chamber 7 end, the creepway changes from a regular-sized one into an 'entrance compartment' which opens into the chamber.

FEATURES

Niches – and a shelf?

There are two of these, one in the south wall of Chamber 1, where it is a recessed area above a 'shelf' cut in the chamber wall

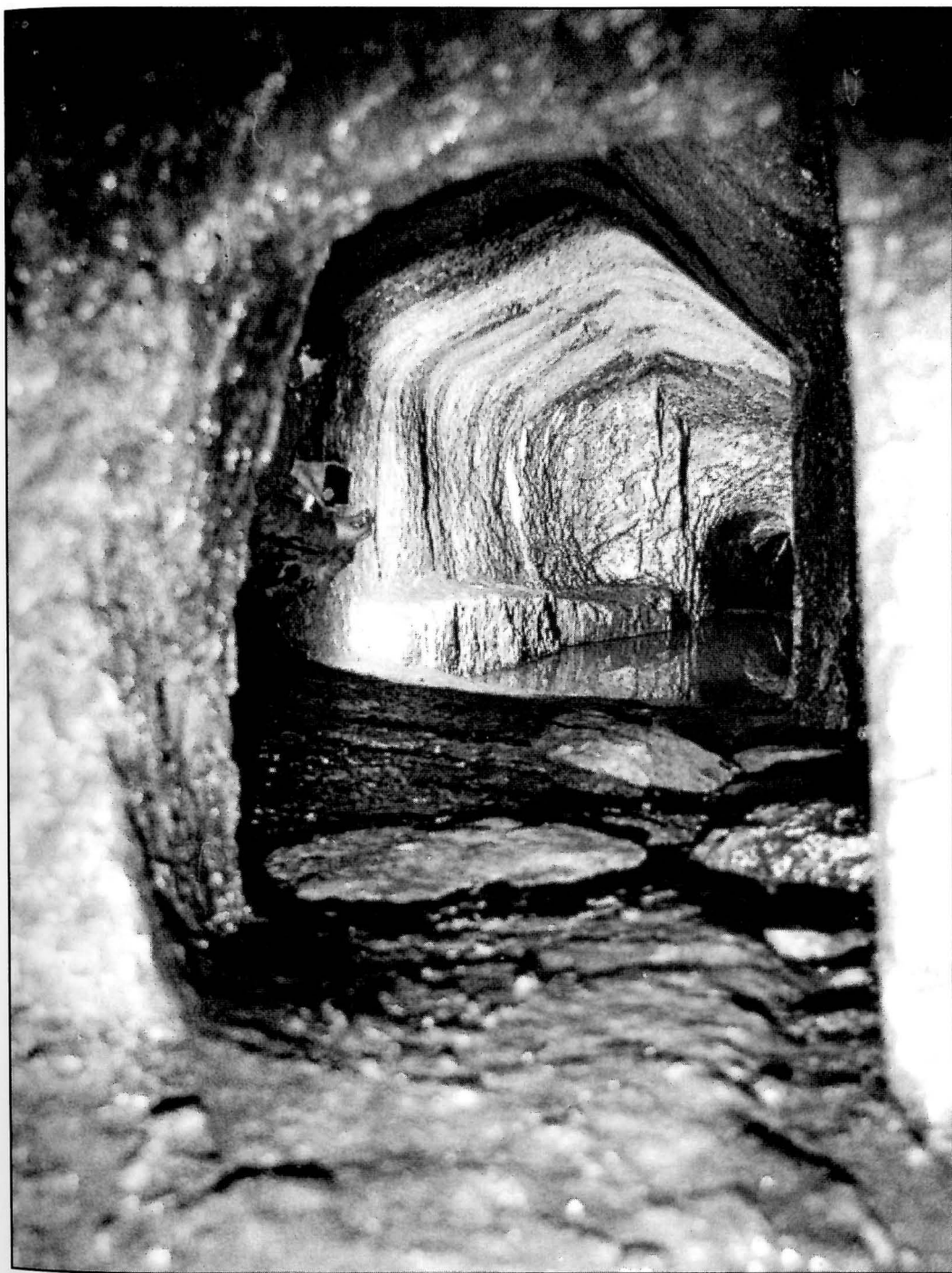
at the S end. Another, though less distinct, is at the N end of Chamber 2. A suggested purpose is as a place in which to stand candles.

Benches

There are two chambers with examples of this feature, and perhaps the shelf mentioned in Chamber 1 above may also have had the same function. Most interesting is that in Chamber 3, where the N, S and W walls have benches. One also occurs at the SE end of Chamber 5. Here, however, one wonders about its functional relationship to the 'basin' described above.

Ledges

This feature is found in two chambers which have already been noted for comparative purposes above, i.e. Chambers 2 and 6. In Chamber 2, one ledge is positioned at the SW end near the excavation shaft ope. The other projects from the



Ill. 5. Dunisky souterrain, Chamber 5 (viewed from Chamber 3), showing arched ceiling, bench and water 'basin' at base of creepole to Chamber 6

opposite wall, running from the SE corner of the chamber back to the creepway entrance to Chamber 3.

Water-gathering features?

Two features might have had this type of function, i.e. the 'basin' in the floor of Chamber 5 and what is indicated on my plan as a 'well' in Chamber 6, although I am not fully confident about the likelihood of this interpretation. It is identified on Gogan's plan as a well, and the 1930 report says unequivocally 'a well, practically square in shape and cut out of the rock which forms the floor'. It also says that this 'well is at present filled with clay to within six inches of the surface'.

Drainage features

One example is a slight channel across the floor of Chamber 3 running roughly NS. This was observed as taking runoff from flooding in Chamber 4 during my survey visit in 1976. The NS fall in floor levels in the souterrain, apart from tunnelling logistics, may also be a design feature intended for this purpose.

A timber stud partition?

The base of the original entrance passage ends in Chamber 4 at a platform-like area raised slightly above the rest of the chamber floor. Three notches are cut into the W edge of this, and these suggest to the author the form of something like a timber stud partition here.

The features of the original entrance

From Chamber 4 a long passage runs east. About mid-way along the N wall, a niche has been off-set from the passage, and directly opposite this, the S wall is slightly recessed. The E end of the passage leads into a vestibule, the long axis of which is roughly at right angles to the passage. In the ceiling of the vestibule is a small shaft, about

45 cm in diameter, which is capped about 20 cm above the ceiling with a slab. The S end of the vestibule opens into an earth-cut compartment which is sub-rectangular in plan, with an earth-cut ceiling in which the base of a boulder is visible. At the E side of the compartment are two long slabs resting on edge. Their upper edges tilt to the W, closing off the top of the compartment. This, I believe, is where the original entrance to the souterrain lay.

Air vents?

I do not think that the modern entrance (Chamber 1) is a modern feature. Rather, it may originally have been an air vent, as suggested by Gogan, or a small escape tunnel leading out into the escarpment which was then widened during the early twentieth century to allow access to the souterrain for investigation purposes. I am also doubtful about the 'vent-hole running upwards towards the present entrance' shown on his plan at the SW corner of Chamber 7 (Gogan's Chamber 6).

DIMENSIONS AND MEASUREMENTS

My measurements, as of the 1976 survey, are given in Tables 1–3. In the case of Chambers 2 and 6, the maximum width is noted.

USAGE: SOME SUGGESTIONS

How was this souterrain intended to function? The following is a scenario which could have taken place were it called into use to protect the more vulnerable members of, say, a Norman community living/working either within the 'castle' grounds or in the surrounding landscape. As a backdrop, some assumptions are made. The field in which the souterrain is located is taken to be the site of the de Cogan 'castle'. This is a motte and bailey-style construction, exploiting the natural features of the site. It was put in place initially for military use. Let us

Table 1
CHAMBERS (in metres)

	CH 1	CH 2	CH 3	CH 4	CH 5	CH 6	CH 7
Length	4.6	6.1	4.2	6.3	5.35	4.0	5.4
Width	1.5	2.0	2.0	1.8	2.0	2.0	1.5
Height	1.25	1.1	1.55	1.5	1.6	1.25	1.5

Table 2
CREEPWAYS / CREEPHOLES (in metres)

	CH 1-2	CH 2-3	CH 3-4	CH 4-5	CH 5-6	CH 6-7
Length	1.25	2.5	0.15	0.4	1.2	0.6
Width	0.5	W 0.45-E 0.55	0.35	0.4	0.5	0.4
Height	0.5	W 0.45-E 1.40	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.45

Table 3
OTHER PASSAGES AND COMPARTMENTS (in metres)

AREA	LENGTH	WIDTH	HEIGHT
CH 7 Ante-room	1.5	0.8	1.0
Original entrance passage	3.0	0.8	0.4
Niche at N side of passage	0.5	0.6	0.8
Vestibule	1.6 (?)	0.9	0.6 (?)
Earth-cut original entrance area	2.1 (?)	1.2 (?)	Not accessed

now imagine it as the focal point of a community of settlers/custodians, incorporating a church and underground refuge. There are times when they are under threat from local/regional chieftains. They need a place to hide, in safety, women, children and the infirm if the garrison is over-run and the fortress burned. In such circumstances, those underground will need provisions to survive for a considerable period until the surface area is vacated by the aggressor. The refuge must be difficult to detect and, if found, easy to defend with a design which allows for various stages of defence. The

option to make escape openings easily at places in the escarpment face – perhaps during darkness – should also exist.

We begin at the original entrance, which I estimate to have been within a 4 m to 6 m arc from the SE corner of the church. There is an impending threat and the community assemble in the 'castle' grounds. Women, children and the infirm go to a pit entrance to the souterrain, which is usually open, as the first chamber below is normally used as a cellar. Once the most vulnerable have entered the souterrain complex behind it, some persons stay in the cellar (Chamber 4),

while those outside close off the entrance with large slabs. They then infill the pit and conceal the surface indications. In the vestibule just inside the entrance, there is a small shaft going directly to the surface, and this is capped with a flagstone. It is by this means that those in the cellar can communicate with persons on the surface. Should the entrance be discovered, the passage-way which leads from the vestibule to the cellar can be defended, as there is a niche midway which allows a defender to hide and dispatch an intruder, the body becoming a blockage for further intruders until removed and a next attempt made.

It is also very difficult for the intruder to wield a weapon while crawling in, whereas a defender can sit crouched in the niche with hands free to make an assault. To try to dig out the inhabitants would take considerable time and resources, as would locating them, because there is no means of determining on the surface in which direction the chambers run. At the base of the passage there is a timber partition, supported by three uprights slotted into the edge of a low platform cut above the rest of the floor level. On the right-hand side of this, the cellar is entered. The cellar stores many timber casks, several of which are positioned behind the partition, with some holding the community's supply of wine.

At this stage of ingress, it would be predictable for an intruder to assume that the cellar was the full extent of what was underground. However, at ground level, in the SW corner of the cellar there is a small hole in the wall blocked by the casks. Behind this lies Chamber 3, where there are benches cut along three walls, a barrel vault-type, well-chiselled ceiling and sufficient room to stand up and walk about, albeit a bit crouched. The capacity here for people seated on the benches is comfortably ten. The chamber has a dry masonry face at one end, which contains the infilled excavation shaft –

which is also visible on one side of the timber partition in the cellar. The chamber has two exits which lead into parallel sets of chambers, one at Chamber 5 and the other at Chamber 2. In the floor in front of the excavation shaft, a small open channel has been cut. This seems to facilitate the run off of seepage water into Chamber 5 where there is a steep fall in the floor coming up to the creepway to Chamber 6. The effect of this fall in floor level is to create a water-collecting 'basin' which lies beneath the base of the creepway. There is a small bench cut from part of the E wall here. Five people occupy this chamber very comfortably, with room for more. Also notable is a very finely chiselled arched ceiling. Entry into Chamber 6 is by a low short passage. It is a rough-cut chamber with slightly raised ledges cut in the floor at each side. Chamber 2 has similar characteristics. In both cases, casks containing provisions for the occupants of the souterrain are stored on the ledges. The ledges leave a channel in the middle of the chamber floor, and this facilitates the run off of seepage water. The casks may have been put in place via the excavation shafts at the time the souterrain was dug, and then filled as required. Also visible in Chamber 6 is a portion of an excavation shaft which is shared with Chamber 7. Leaving Chamber 6, there is another low passage. This leads to an ante-room, where it is possible to kneel upright before entering another chamber which comfortably provides accommodation for a further five persons, with room for more. At the end of the chamber, there is a slight cleft between the sloping rock of the ceiling and that of the floor. The earth filling this is part of the escarpment face; with a slight amount of chiselling and digging, an exit can be made here.

Returning to Chamber 3, one imagines children and some adults having gone down the passage which leads west. It is necessary to crawl through the lower part of this. It

brings one to Chamber 2, and there the masonry wall of another excavation shaft can be seen. The creepway beside it brings you into Chamber 1 where five people are located. At the S end of the chamber, there is a 'shelf' cut in the back wall and, on top of this, a niche holds a candle. This is less crude than the candle niche at the north end of Chamber 2. About midway in the west wall of Chamber 1, there is a creephole too small for the average adult to enter. There is a passage beyond this which is narrow and significantly higher than the creephole. Children have gone into this and followed it, possibly, to a further chamber tunnelled from another face of the Chambers 1 to 2 excavation shaft. Alternatively, there may be a further series of chambers – and perhaps an exit? Back in Chamber 1, beside the shelf, there is an upward-sloping shaft which runs to the escarpment face. This is concealed by vegetation outside. It can be widened for use as an exit.

The occupants wait in the souterrain until given the 'all clear' by someone on the surface communicating, via the vestibule shaft, with the occupants of the cellar (Chamber 4). They, in turn, communicate with the rest. It has turned out to be a false alarm.

CONCLUSION

The souterrain described in this paper could be well provisioned, having its own store-rooms. It might comfortably hold over 25 persons, not including those who might have stayed in the cellar and the children who may be thought to have gone down the passage off Chamber 1.

Was the souterrain ever used? What happened when the Mac Carthys burned the 'castle'? If the souterrain is contemporary with the church and if the 'castle' is in the same place, then does the souterrain pre- or post-date the burning of 1261? What other events in subsequent history could have led to the need for its creation? Might it be a

nineteenth-century folly? If so, could the design be based on originals in France? Should we step back in time prior to the Norman incursion into this territory and identify the souterrain with an indigenous tradition and associated settlement? If so, does *dûn* imply an entity in the native tradition, or does it represent a local term applied to something of perceived similar purpose but from a different culture (O'Flanagan 1979)? And finally, could there have been more than one phase in the excavation of the site, giving it a design reflecting a combination of traditions? Perhaps only through archaeological excavation will we get any closer to answering such questions.

Should a Norman scenario prove true, then it may be useful to bear in mind the remarks of Jérôme and Laurent Triolet, *Étude des Souterrains, France*, in response to viewing a copy of my plan and some photographs (pers. comm.). Regarding the shape of the walls and ceiling in Chamber 5, they say that such is common in souterrains in the south-west part of France. They describe Dunisky as a 'typical souterrain-refuge', based on the presence of benches, ledges, wells and creepways/creepholes. They describe it as having a 'passive defense', like sites in France dating from the thirteenth, fourteenth, and even the twelfth, centuries. They suggest Dunisky could be dated from the thirteenth century, before or after the burning of the de Cogan settlement in 1261.

However, they also strike a note of caution by saying that, even though there is a major 'resemblance' between Dunisky and certain types of French souterrains, proving a French origin could be difficult, as resemblances might be co-incidental. English soldiers would certainly have encountered the French 'souterrain-refuge' during the Hundred Years War. The Compreignac church souterrain was already in existence when that church was burned by English

soldiers in 1370-71. As a final word, whatever insights time, and more in-depth research, may bring, it is undeniable that the Dunisky souterrain is an intriguing enigma.

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