

## Parish Boundaries

Parish boundaries are often a source of animated discussion in GAA circles, particularly in county Kilkenny where the parish rule operates. From the beginning the parish was an important element in the GAA. It was the aim of the founding fathers of the GAA to have a GAA club in every parish in Ireland. But at the beginning boundaries do not seem to have been so important. Kells, the first team in this parish, was a Dunnamaggin-Danesfort combination. The rule initially does not seem to have been strictly enforced, but the following year Kells lost the second round on an objection based on the parish rule. The rule was later modified and for many years abandoned altogether.

In the wake of Carrickshock's four-in-a-row a three-parish rule came into existence and lasted for three years, 1944-46. It was reinstated again in December 1952 after an impassioned plea from Peadar Laffan at the county convention. The following year the parish rule as it presently exists was adopted. The boundaries of the Catholic parishes were the accepted parish boundaries.

It is perhaps little realised that parish boundaries are often of very ancient vintage. The present parish structure in Kilkenny is the product of three periods - the medieval period when what are known as the civil parishes were set up, the 17th century when a post-reformation reorganization of the parish structure took place and the nineteenth century when many parishes were divided.

The medieval parish structure was set up by the Normans in the late twelfth or early thirteenth centuries, and some of these boundaries may even have reflected the ancient tuath boundaries. The next stage came in the early 1600s as the Church began to reorganize itself after the dark days of Elizabeth I. Three, four, five, six or even seven parishes were united along with parts of other parishes to form one unit with a church and a resident parish priest. Geographical considerations played a part in this reorganization as did the barony boundaries, and there was also the necessity to provide an adequate 'living' for the priest serving the new parish. The result was that the diocese of Ossory was divided into twenty-eight or nine parishes. It is relatively easy to define the boundaries of these parishes as the boundaries of the old civil parishes were kept for the most part, and where they were not, the townland boundaries were followed.

Over the course of time some boundaries 'moved' for various reasons. It may have been due to the lack of knowledge of exact boundaries or of a chapel in the vicinity (leading to people going on a regular basis to a chapel in a neighbouring parish). A parish priest may have 'unofficially' agreed boundary changes with his neighbour, particularly if he had become old and infirm and was unable to reach the extremities of his parish. There may have been a disagreement with the parish priest over some issue, as is said to have happened in a small Kilkenny townland in Castlecomer leading to it becoming part of Ballinakill parish. It was probably some kind of 'unofficial' agreement that led to a portion of the townland of Carrigatna which is part of Kilmoganny civil parish becoming part of Aghavillar

As the population increased towards the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th many of these large parishes were divided. Occasionally townlands were divided at this time - but very rarely as between Ballyragget and Conahy. A number of parishes were never divided -

Ballycallan, Urlingford, Inistioge, Rosbercon, Templeorum (Piltown), but most were. Castlecomer and Slieverue-Glenmore were eventually divided into three parts.

Dunnamaggin's case is not unlike many others in Kilkenny. In the 17th century a new parish was formed from five ancient parishes, Dunnamaggin, Kilmoganny, Kilree, Lamogue and Tullahaught, and part of two others, Kells and Coolaghmore. Not all of Dunnamaggin was retained in the new parish. The townland of Baysrath which had a detached portion in Sheepstown was made part of the united parishes of Aghavillar and Ballyhale probably for geographical reasons. Kells was divided, a large portion being included in Danesfort again probably for the same reasons. The new parish contained what is now the parishes of Dunnamaggin and Windgap. The united parishes were divided in 1826 into Dunnamaggin and Windgap

The most ancient boundaries in Dunnamaggin are those of the parishes of Dunnamaggin and Kilree in the east, Kells in the north, Ballaghtobin in the west and Kilmoganny in the south. These boundaries are at least eight hundred years old, and possibly even older. F.Ó F.