

Peadar Taidhg Buidhe in Broadford, Co. Clare

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In 1967 Etienne Rynne published a note¹ on a sheela-na-gig on the bridge over the canal at Cloonlara, Co. Clare.² In this he recorded the fact that Cloonlara native Right-Reverend Monsignor Michael Hamilton recollected hearing the names *Peadar Taidhg Buidhe* and *Peadar Taille Bhuidhe*³ being applied to the sheela-na-gig though he could not elicit the origin of these names. In 1971 An tUasal Pádraig Ó Bheachán, (d. 1992) my very religious Headmaster in Scarriff Secondary School, having found an offprint of Rynne's article among my books, dashed past me one day expressing the opinion 'Rynne is all wrong' as he went in pursuit of a noisy pupil – his point was that linking of the names with the sheela-na-gig was incorrect. Months later he brought me to meet three people, Jack McDonald (d. 1978) and Daniel McKenna of Broadford, and Michael Kelly of Oatfield, (d. c.1979) who had stories based on P.T.B. The first two men brought me to visit three places allegedly frequented by P.T.B. The stories are given below in the language used by the storytellers. All the places visited are in Violet Hill, immediately north of Broadford (Clare OS 6 inch sheet 44 and Discovery Series Sheet 58). The first is the place on the old road from Broadford to Scarriff where the drama of the third story was enacted. The second is a rock which is reputed to be a seat used by P.T.B. It may originally have had many ledges on which she kept her bits and pieces but these were broken off in two phases, the latter about 1950. The final place visited is a small yew tree not far from the above mentioned rock. This tree provided shelter for P.T.B. and a good view when she was watching for people to rob as is recorded in the third story. This yew tree was ringed with small rocks in 1971.

Story I: One day a priest was going on horseback to make a sick call in the Broadford area. A woman, P.T.B., jumped up behind him on the horse. She told him that her "hand was heavy". He asked her why this was so. She said she had killed her father. He said that that was not true. She said she killed her mother. He said that that was not true either. She said she killed an unborn child. This time he told her that she was telling the truth, but that it did not matter as she was damned irrespective of her having confessed her crime.

Story II: Long, long ago, all the countryside, from Cratloe to Killaloe, from Broadford to the back of Slieve Barnagh, was planted with many kinds of trees. Peace reigned in the land and all was quiet. A knowledgeable woman, more so than old Bidy Gleeson

¹ Etienne Rynne, 'A Sheela-na-Gig at Cloonlara, Co. Clare', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 10:2 (1967) pp 221-2, and Pl. VIII. See Martin A. Timoney, 'Etienne Rynne (1932-2012)', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 53 (2013) p. 9, for my introduction to Clare antiquarian matters through P.T.B.!

² T.J. Westropp, 'A Folklore Survey of County Clare', *Folklore*, (1910-13) p. 344, writes of a She-Ghost who was causing problems with the building of the canal bridge in 1769, and comfort was restored after the sheela-na-gig was set in the bridge parapet. He wonders which of Rinroe, Newtown or Aharinagh tower houses it was taken from but he does not record any name or tradition for the stone.

³ As there are at least seven variants of the name, *Peadar Taidhg Buidhe*, *Peadar Taille Bhuidhe*, *Pick Ataigh Buidhe*, *Puick Ataigh Buidhe*, *Fuite Taidhe Buidhe*, *Puite Ataigh Buidhe* and *Puite Tile Buidhe*, P.T.B. is used for convenience hereinafter. No informant could explain the name except saying that she was a lady with a yellow face. Some pointed out that the partly similarly sounding *machain tá buidhe* is a poisonous parsnip-like plant which grows in a stream.

or Biddy Early, known as P.T.B. lived near Broadford. She could foretell the future. She forewarned the women of Broadford of the dangers of not covering a particular well having taken water from it. The danger lay in that it could overflow and spread into a lake. In this prophesy she was foretelling her own downfall. Since the water from the well was of a superb quality it was much used by the people of Broadford. One day a woman had just taken water from the well when she heard her child roaring and crying some distance away. She ran back to the house leaving the well uncovered. The prophesy came true, the well burst forth and filled a small valley just west of Broadford, forming what is now known as Doon Lough. Many people were drowned by the flood but P.T.B. somehow saved herself and her son. His name was *Bac Laidre*, i.e., The Bent Strong Person.

Bac Laidre was a *lathartach*, i.e., a lazy langry person, but he was not disobedient. He was hated by all but his mother. Since he lived in a land of milk and honey he grew up to be a giant. He was normally very quiet but he had a fierce temper. People feared him and so there was peace in the land. Other giants lived in Kerry, on Keeper Hill in Tipperary and on the Hills of Galway. One day when *Bac Laidre* was out walking he found the Kerry giant tearing up trees in the area around Cratloe in order to ensure that no county would be as beautiful as Kerry. This annoyed *Bac Laidre* very much and he challenged the Kerry giant to a fight. They agreed to meet on a certain day to settle their differences. *Bac Laidre* went out for practice, pulling up trees and throwing chunks of ground around him - one such chunk now forms an island in Doon Lough. When *Bac Laidre* went home his mother noticed that there was a *buairt* on him. He eventually told his mother what had happened. She fed him, put him to bed and went off to try to dissuade the Kerry giant from taking part in the fight.

She reminded him that the giants should unite against the common enemy who was preparing for war to the east. Not succeeding in dissuading him she suggested that the two giants would have a stone throwing competition. She returned to tell *Bac Laidre* and he agreed. *Bac Laidre* went off on the day of the proposed encounter and met the Kerry giant at Buan a Binne. A great noise filled the air. *Bac Laidre*, the King of Slieve Barnagh, began the rock-throwing encounter. He picked up a rock, put one foot on Ardskeagh, jumped on Croghaun and let the stone fly. It sunk deep in the ground at Cratloe. When the Kerry giant picked it up a well known as Tobar an Airigid was formed. He proceeded to toss the rock back towards Ardskeagh but since his run was shorter than that of *Bac Laidre* the rock only reached to Knockaphonta. One of these stones is the *farbreaga* in Cloontra, Cloonlara, on the sheltered side of Cnoch a Phonta. At this the Kerry giant went home defeated. *Bac Laidre* was not satisfied as he feared the serpents and the yellow monster that the Kerry giant had. At this time the river Shannon used to flow out by Mountshannon and Scarriff to Tulla and on to the Fergus.⁴ He wanted to keep the giant of Keeper Hill away from his county as well as the serpents belonging to the Kerry giant so he decided to change the course of the Shannon to its present line. While tearing out the new course with his heel it caught in the slates near Killaloe on two occasions. On both he let off a great rift of wind. The first formed Craglea in Clare, the second formed *Dubh Thara*, i.e., Hill of the Black Witch, in Tipperary. He found the going easy around Castleconnell and from there he formed the new course out as far as Ring Abhna, (i.e.

⁴ This theme of an earlier route for the River Shannon via the Scarriff gap, Tulla, Ennis and the Fergus to the Shannon Estuary with a subsequent down-cutting through the harder rocks south of Killaloe has a historical geological explanation as discussed by James R. Kilroe, 'The River Shannon: its present Course and Geological History', *Proc. Royal Irish Academy*, 26B8 (1907) pp 74-96, particularly pp 76, 88 and 96, and by J.B. Whittow, *Geology and Scenery in Ireland* (Harmondsworth, 1974) pp 188-91, particularly fig. 31. Presumably this story has its basis in people reading the landscape rather than from a *Proc. Royal Irish Academy* paper.

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Rineanna). By this *Bac Laidre* protected himself from his enemies to the south and east and lived in peace ever after. *Bac Laidre* was buried in a "Giant's Grave" at Hurdlestown, south of Broadford, which his brother is reputed to have brought the rocks to.

Story III: Broadford is a village on the main road from Limerick to Bodyke and Scarriff. This was the route used in past times by people returning from a day's shopping in Limerick. P.T.B. was a witch who lived along the road near Broadford. She used to accost the people returning from Limerick irrespective of whether they were on foot or on horseback.

In order to put an end to this highway robbery the parish priest of Kilseiley and Killo-gennedy dressed up as a farmer and moved into her area. She halted him to take his belongings. He put his hand in his pocket apparently to hand over his money. Instead he drew out a knife, and, after a struggle, he succeeded in sticking it in her. She implored him to withdraw the knife and stick it in her again. Becoming suspicious of her motive he did not do as she asked. He said he was banishing her to Kimstone Island,⁵ in Doon Lough, telling her she could leave the island once in every seven years but that she must return again until such time as she had made *sugaín* out of the sands. The priest left the scene only to return later. All that remained to be seen was a heap of jelly-like substance with the knife in the middle of it. This meant that she had gone to Kimstone Island where she still remains - *sugaín* cannot be made from sand. Local people claim to see lights at various times on the island.

Comment

All three stories recorded have a moral purpose. The first argues against abortion, the second condemns internal fighting in Ireland when the people should be uniting against the common enemy and the third condemns theft and points to eternal punishment. None of my informants, all of whom lived within eight miles of Cloonlara, could recollect ever having heard of any link between the Broadford P.T.B. and the sheela-na-gig at Cloonlara. The latter was recorded in 1967 by Rynne as 'The Witch's Stone' and the leading role in each story above is played by a witch. It is possible that people merged the two witch stories and people applied the name of the more famous, or more infamous, one to the sheela-na-gig at Cloonlara.

⁵ Captain Kimstone used to put his ever-so beautiful wife out on an island in Doon Lough to keep her away from other men when he was going away!