

The parish and Barony owes its present name to a corruption of the Irish name of the mediaeval town situated near the centre of the parish. The Irish name was "Burgéis Uinall", the town or "burgage" of Uinall. The name Uinall is one which cannot be satisfactorily explained. It is known to have been the ancient name of the whole territory around Clew Bay. Several attempts have been made to explain the name. According to a story in the Dindenchas (Todd Lecture Series, XI, 272) the district got its name from "Uinall servant of the generous Finlan, who fell there, killed by the Tuairn de Danmhu during the first battle of Moytura..." Another explanation given in the same volume (ibid, 274) says that Mannanan Mac Lir put a "wall of brass" (Umha) round the whole district and from that wall it was called "Uinall." The oldest document containing the name is the Book of Armagh. Tradition holds that this district was one of the hunting grounds of the Piarra Eireann so it is possible that the district is named after the leader of these warriors, whose name was Fionn mac Uinall, Finn McCool.

The earliest monuments in the parish are fonts and standing stones and these may indicate an occupation of the area as early as Bronze Age times. ~~Some time ago~~ some local men "hugged" a font in the N.E. corner of the parish in the ~~territory of Letterkeen~~ and found a Bronze Age burial accompanied by a food vessel pot which is now in the ~~National Museum~~. According to Dindenchas (Todd Lecture Series, X, 440) Clays Uinall were among the earliest of the historic settlers in this area. These may have been Celts. These were over come by the Uí Breón, relations of Niall of the Nine Hostages. From the Uí Breón descended the O'Malleys who held lands here ever since and whose descendants are found now all over this part of Mayo including Achill Island. The Uí Breón were a great sea-faring people and this activity lived on in the O'Malleys. Grannia Uaile (Grace O'Malley) was one of the more famous O'Malleys. She lived in the time of Queen Elizabeth to whom she paid a visit on one occasion. There are many legendary accounts of what took place at the meeting but most of them seem to indicate that Grannia considered herself the queen's equal in all respects and didn't hesitate to say so to Elizabeth. However that may be, Grannia welded her people together and became a great force in the west. Almost every castle in this part of Mayo is

said to have been built by her tho' in most cases there is ample proof to show that this is not so and that the O'Malley castles were really quite few and nearly all were built before her time.

When the Normans came, two ~~large~~ groups of them settled in this district. These were the De Bungos and the Butlers. The O'Malleys resisted the new comers for a time and when they could hold out no longer Grounna is said to have married the chief of the Bunkers. She is said to have made an agreement with her husband that the marriage would be only ^{on trial for the 1st} ~~one~~ year. During this year Grounna gradually got her own followers into all of Bunker's castles and then at the end of the stipulated year she sent Bunker away and was thus able to hold her own and Bunker's territories for a long time afterwards. The only castles which were really O'Malley structures are Kildownet on Achill Island, a castle at Louisburg and one on Clane Island. All the others - 2 at Burreishole near the quay, Carrigahowley or Rockfleet and one at Newport, all now gone except Carrigahowley - were Bunker castles.

In the beginning of the 16th century some of the O'Donnells of the north came to Burreishole as mercenary soldiers for the Bunkers. They eventually spread over a large part of the lands around Clew Bay. Until very recent years the descendants of one of these O'Donnells lived at Newport House. He was Sir George O'Donnell who died quite recently. The house is now owned by a Mrs Lyne who had at one time been married into the O'Donnell family. The owner does not live in the place and it is beginning to go to ruin. It is of no architectural interest whatever and tho' it contains some pictures, old furniture and a small collection of books, none are of any interest or importance. The only object of interest possessed by the house was an early Irish 15th copy of the Phoenicia. This is now in the B.L.H. collection and is called the "Lairie" because in the early days the O'Donnells always bore it before them when they were going into battle.

Fr. Mac Sweeney was born near Keel, Achill Island. From his very young days he was noted for his holiness and piety and always had a desire to become a priest. Tradition has it that in his young days he obtained a good knowledge of French & Latin from a hedge schoolmaster on Achill Is. It is held that he eventually studied at the Irish College in Paris but nothing is known of his life on the continent, nor is it known when he returned to Ireland. In 1798 he was curate at Newport in the parish of Kurnishole.

Hubert landed at Killala and shortly after the English defeat at Castlebar (the battle known as "The Races of Castlebar") some French officers & men came to Newport. One of the officers on meeting Fr. Mac Sweeney addressed him in French and was immediately recognised as an acquaintance whom he had met some years before in France. This incident was observed by Fr. Mac Sweeney's enemies who immediately set about his undoing. A warrant for his arrest was issued but Fr. Manus had meanwhile fled to Achill. Chase was given and he was eventually caught in the village called "The Valley" near Dugout on Achill. It is said that he lay hidden in a barn loft while the soldiers searched in vain. On giving up the search one of them fired a random shot in the direction of the barn and an old woman exclaimed in terror, "Ó cá an saizaire boscite" thus giving proof of the priest's presence. He was dragged from his hiding place and the party proceeded to Newport. On the way Fr. Manus asked for a drink and when the vessel was brought a soldier dashed it to the ground. Another and more humane soldier took off his boot which happened to be new and clean and filling it with water offered it to the priest, who drank and bestowed a blessing on the man. The exceedingly long life which this soldier is said to have enjoyed is attributed to Fr. Sweeney's benediction.

The priest was lodged in Castlebar gaol. Some traditions say that he again escaped to the "Valley", but whether this is so or not, he was eventually tried and sentenced to death. He was brought to Newport and on the 8th of June 1799 was hanged. When he was led out to the scaffold the people made an attempt to save him but Fr. Manus is said to have begged them to desist for their own sakes. The soldiers are said to have offered £1 each for his ransom which was refused. Fr. Manus

was obliged to stand on a table and the noose was put round his neck and the other end of the rope fastened to the arm of the Market crane. The table was then removed and the priest hung there till life expired.

This took place in the market yard immediately beside Devine's Hotel in the Main Street of Newport. Until recent times this space was still an open yard in which stood the ruins of what was said to have been a small shop in 1799. In this shop the hangman is said to have obtained soap or grease which he applied to the rope. In any case, because of these traditions no one would have anything to do with the site till very recently when it was built upon.

Tradition says that some days after the hanging an Englishman passed by on his way to the Llorca peninsula on a shooting expedition. As he passed the dangling body he called out in diversion "Ce m'écrit en sa sptingear m'den?" ("How much is the old beef today?"). He went on his way but after some time failed to return. A little while later his gun dogs slunk back bringing in their jaws some of his rotting flesh and bones. His death is attributed to his evil remark on seeing the dead body of Fr Manus.

He was buried in the nave of Berrishole Abbey just west of the base of the tower where stands a monument to his memory.

Note: This is the story of Fr Manus Mac Lweeney or still told locally. Some of these traditions are recorded by Fr. M. O'Donnell in a pamphlet on Berrishole Abbey published by the Catholic Truth Society.