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Author: Ó Murchadha, Diarmuid

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The Irish Name of Crosshaven

By DIARMUID Ó MURCHADHA

It is generally believed that the correct Irish name of Crosshaven, (Co. Cork) is 'Bun tSabhairne,' i.e. 'the mouth of the River Sabhrann.'¹ I cannot find any basis, historical or otherwise, for this form of the place-name.

The spelling varies, but place-name collectors² are agreed that the pronunciation is 'Bunatáirne'. The question that now arises is: how could this form have evolved from an earlier *Bun Sabrainne? The medial (unaccented) vowel is the main difficulty. Sabrann being feminine,³ if the article is to be used, we would expect 'Bun na Sabhrainne.' A 't' before the 'S' here would be completely ungrammatical. If no article is present (as in most 'bun plus river' names),⁴ we are left with an original 'Bun Sabhrainne,' which might change to 'Bun tSabhrainne,' but would hardly develop into 'Bun-a-tSabhrainne.' We have Ceann Sáile becoming Cionn tSáile, but not Cionn-a-tSáile. There is no more inherent difficulty in pronouncing Bun tSabhrainne than in pronouncing Cionn tSáile, yet we find that the spoken form is unmistakably 'Bun-a-Táirne.'

Furthermore, we would expect the medial *-abh-* to develop (in Cork, at any rate), into a diphthong *-au-*, and not into long *-á-*.

Joseph Lloyd, in Pt. I of *Post-Sheanchas* (1905) made the name 'Bun an tSáile,' and corrected it in Pt. II (1911) to 'Bun an Táibhairne.' Michael Murphy (*Journ. Ivern. Soc.* 1914) rejected this explanation ('the low-land of the Tavern'), and owing to the usual association of 'Bun' with a river-mouth, decided that 'Atáirne' was, in fact, an old name for the Owenabwee.⁵ This speculation may have given rise to the Bun tSabhrainne theory, which appeared for the first time (to my knowledge) in an article in *An Claidheamh Soluis* about 1917. This article was quoted by K. V. O'Leary (Place-names of Kerrycurrihy, *J.C.H.A.S.*, XXV, 1919), but she also gave her own version as: 'Bun an Táibhairne: Ale-House Hollow.' Why reject this simple explanation?

The modern village of Crosshaven is in the townland of Knocknagore, and faces the older Crosshaven, which is a narrow townland stretching from Templebreedy to Kennefick's Corner, and along the shore as far as Camden.⁶

¹ Sabrann is an old name for the Lee.

² e.g. M. Murphy, *Journal of the Ivernian Society* VI (1914), p. 111. K. V. O'Leary, *J.C.H.A.S.*, XXV (1919), p. 84. Though there are no local native speakers of Irish now alive, many of the older people remember the name 'Bunatáirne.'

³ Hogan's *Onomasticon Goedelicum* quotes O'Heerin and L. Brecc for the gen. 'na Sabrainne,' and has three other references for the dat. 'Sabrainn.'

⁴ The *Onom. Goed.* has: Bun Sentuine, Bun Stúire, Bun suainmhe, Bun suanba, Bun suicín.,

⁵ Not the Lee. It is, in fact, very questionable whether, geographically speaking, Crosshaven could be described as being 'at the mouth of the Lee.'

⁶ Part of the foreshore between Kennefick's Corner and The Point is entitled 'Old Quay' on the 1st ed. of the 6" Ord. Map, surveyed in 1842. The Griffith Valuation Survey (1850-2) lists 20 houses in 'Castle Point Village' (at the 'Point.')

This is the Crosshaven townland we find mentioned in official documents as far back as 1588, in which year it appears in a Bill of Complaint by John Coppinger against Sir Warham St. Leger.⁷ It may have been the St. Legers who were responsible for the introduction of the English form "Crosshaven."⁸

Up to (and including) 1588 an older name was in use; another Bill of Complaint of that year refers to 'Crosshane in Kerrycurrye.'⁹

A List of the Earl of Desmond's lands in 1572 includes 'the manor of Beawer, otherwise Carig-Ityn (Carrigaline) and also Crostean.'¹⁰

The town of 'Crosshoun'¹¹ mentioned in connection with a law-case in the *Calendar of the Justiciary Rolls of Ireland*, 1305-07, under 8 July 1307, may also be Crosshaven.

Finally, it appears on Boazio's map (c. 1600) as C. Crestram, on John Norden's (c. 1610) as C. Cresham, and on Speed's (Map of Ireland, c. 1610) as C. Christian.¹² It is likely that these forms are based on 16th century maps or documents.

That the old name signified a Cross dedicated to St. John may be deduced from a document¹³ preserved by the Jesuits in Dublin, recording a grant¹⁴ made to their Society by James Fitzmaurice, 26 Feb. 1577, '. . . in *pago dicto a cruce S. Joannis ubi olim fuerat Ecclesia S. Brigidae.*'¹⁵

Cros Seán¹⁶ is the obvious solution, but judging from the map-forms it is more likely to have been Crois Seáin, which is phonetically simpler. The forms 'Crostean' and 'Christian' indicate an alternative Cros or Crois tSeáin.

I have never come across anything resembling Bun tSabhrainne or Bun an Tábhairne in official documents. For 'Bun tSabhrainne' to be genuine, it must date back to the days before the Norman Invasion when the river-name 'Sabrann' was in use. I fail to see how it could have disappeared in the 16th century, to be replaced by Crois tSeáin, and re-appear in later years in the mouths of the local Irish-speaking people.

In my opinion, the modern village had its beginnings in the 17th century.¹⁷ Though called Crosshaven in English, it was outside the townland of that

⁷ *Calendar of State Papers, Ireland*, 1588-92, No. 21, sect. 76.

⁸ Around the end of the 16th century, a large number of 'havens' begin to appear in official documents relating to the coast of Co. Cork: Crook Haven, Arundel Haven, Scoole-Haven, etc. See lists of Havens in *Caulfield's Council Book of Kinsale*, pp. XXIII, XXV.

⁹ *Cal. State Papers, Ire.*, 1588-92, No. 21, sect. 30.

¹⁰ *Calendar of Carew MSS*, 1515-74, p. 417.

¹¹ Possibly Cros Eoin?

¹² C. indicates a castle. This was situated at the (Castle) Point. A stone (presently in the writer's possession), which was unearthed here recently by Mr Donal O'Brien, Crosshaven, appears to be part of a pointed window-arch, and presumably belonged to Crosshaven Castle.

¹³ Extract published in *J.R.S.A.I.*, LXIV (1934), p. 258.

¹⁴ This grant did not take effect.

¹⁵ i.e., Templebreedy.

¹⁶ cf. Baile Sheain, in *A.F.M.*, IV, p. 1328 (1514 A.D.)

¹⁷ Houses are shown on this 'new' site on the Chart of Cork Harbour first published in John Seller's, *The English Pilot*, Book I (1690).

name, and speakers of Irish, usually more accurate in topographical designations,¹⁸ gave it, I suggest, a new name—Bun a[n]Tábhairne. (No doubt a tavern was amongst its early amenities).

While 'Bun' may have been used in place-names in the older language exclusively to denote a river-mouth, in modern Irish it may be used to signify the foot of a hill or any low-lying place. Joyce's *Irish Names of Places* (Vol. III) has, amongst others: *Bun an aireachtais* and *Bun na mbothán* (Co. Mayo); *Bun na gceapán* and *Bun na saileach* (Co. Galway), and *Bun na lon* (Co. Cork).

It seems a pity to spoil the illusion of an ancient name linked with Celtic river-deities and Ptolemy's Dabrona, but there is no point in retaining in use an Irish place-name which turns out to be, in fact, a 'ghost-name.'

¹⁸ Similarly, the village of Carrigaline, not being wholly situated in the townlands of that name, was known locally (in the 19th cent.) as 'Bóthar Buí.' Ballyferriter village in W. Kerry is known to the local people as 'An Buailtín,' being in a different townland to 'Baile an Fhírtéirig.'