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The Last Kings of Ireland: Material Expressions of Gaelic Lordship c. 1300-1400 A.D.

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2016 The last kings of Ireland: material expressions of Gaelic lordship c. 1300-1400 A.D. In K. Buchanan and L.H.S. Dean with Michael Penman (eds), *Medieval and early modern representations of authority in Scotland and the British Isles*, 197-213. Routledge, London and New York.

Introduction

The centralising administration of Edward I in Ireland, between 1272 and 1307, determined to disable the authority of all Gaelic kings, irrevocably. This process is reflected in Crown documentation which, soon after 1300, addresses major Irish leaders as *duces* rather than *reges* or *reguli* and sometimes just by their names with the distinguishing qualification *hibernicus*.² Freya Verstraten has pointed out that the replacement of the title king with *dux*, seen as early as the mid-thirteenth century in government documentation, is mirrored in Vatican documents, where one finds Donnchad Cairprech Ua Briain, king of Thomond, referred to as *dominus* by pope Innocent IV (1243-54).³ In those rare instances when the term 'king' was used by the Crown as a form of address to Gaelic aristocracy during the fourteenth century, it was, as Robin Frame observes, applied with contempt and used 'only to describe lesser figures who presented no threat'.⁴

Status anxiety among Gaelic Irish dynastic families, induced by this change in rank, appears to have been considerable and led to renewed claims to kingship by some of them during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Kingly pretensions in this period have traditionally been viewed as part of Gaelic 'revival' and 'resurgence', terms which, through general usage, have generated a kind of uncritical acceptance. Revival and resurgence imply renewal or coming back into being. However, kingship titles were not 'revived'⁵ in any meaningful long-term capacity but rather, publicized, during an extraordinary period in which Gaelic elite identity was thoroughly refashioned. This self-refashioning, with status as the central concern, was facilitated from the mid-thirteenth century onwards by what Frame has described as 'a loss of colonising impetus' on the part of Anglo-Norman society, typified by abandonment of manors in the Midlands, North

¹ My thanks to Dr Paul Naessens for the map that accompanies the text, to Dr Mark Stansbury (NUI Galway) for discussion about the shrine inscriptions, and to the National Museum of Ireland.

² Katharine Simms, *From Kings to Warlords: The Changing Political Structure of Gaelic Ireland in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1987), pp. 36-7.

³ Freya Verstraten, 'Images of Gaelic Lordship in Ireland, c. 1200–c. 1400', in Linda Doran and James Lyttleton (eds), *Lordship in Medieval Ireland: Image and Reality* (Dublin, 2007), pp. 68-9.

⁴ Robin Frame, 'Two Kings in Leinster: The Crown and the Mic Mhurchadha in the Fourteenth Century', in Terry Barry, Robin Frame and Katharine Simms (eds), *Colony and Frontier in Medieval Ireland* (London, 1995), p. 156.

⁵ Ragnall Ó Floinn, 'The Norman Conquest and the Later Middle Ages, 1169 A. D. – c. 1500 A.D.', in Michael Ryan (ed.), *Treasures of Ireland: Irish Art 3000 B.C. – 1500 A.D.* (Dublin, 1983), p. 185.

Tipperary and the Southeast of Ireland, and greatly compounded and accelerated by climate change and attacks on colonial settlements by an improved Gaelic military.⁶

Katharine Simms has explained the history of the changing political structure of this period, in which Gaelic elites gradually transformed from kings into warlords. While political and institutional change characterise these shifts in the Gaelic world, it can be argued that the principal expression of the refashioning of Gaelic elite self-identity was material. This paper focuses on the refurbishment of book shrines during the fourteenth and early fifteenth century and the emergence of the *pailís* c. 1300, as significant material expressions of erstwhile kingship, by Gaelic lords.

Artefacts of Kingship

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, political recovery of Gaelic ruling families was expressed materially by the commissioning of great books, inclusive of family genealogies, such as the late fourteenth-century books of Ballymote, Lecan, and Uí Mhaine⁷ and by the refurbishment of earlier book shrines accompanied by potent donor inscriptions.⁸ Gaelic lords behaved like kings and publicly expressed themselves as royal through an array of material media, from the patronage of mendicant houses to the use of seals and heraldry, by hosting great feasts at pseudo-historical capitals of the island,⁹ and by having themselves inaugurated on stone thrones.¹⁰ This elite refashioning was also reflected in the act of convening assemblies at traditional sites but with the introduction of new rituals.¹¹

Of the eight surviving Irish book shrines of pre-Norman origin, four of them were altered, embellished and inscribed during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The authors of these changes were Gaelic lords who designated themselves as kings in new inscriptions that were part of a political re-modelling of book shrines as objects of fanciful royal regalia. One of the two main faces of the shrine of the Stowe Missal (initially crafted in the mid-eleventh century for a small pocket-size manuscript) was altered in the late fourteenth century by Pilib Ó Ceinnéidigh, lord of Urumhan (Fig. 1). The refurbished face of the shrine is ostentatiously decked with a 'jewelled cross of gilt silver set with rock crystals, and studs of blue and red glass'. Ó Ceinnéidigh styled himself 'king' in the donor inscription in the Irish language which reads 'OR DO PILIB DO RIG URU (MAND) and translates as 'A prayer for Pilib, king of Ormond who covered this shrine'. His wife, Áine, is included in the dedication, as well as the craftsman and the abbot of the Augustinian priory of Lorrha in north Tipperary.¹²

⁶ Frame, 'Two Kings in Leinster', p. 158.

⁷ Bernadette Cunningham and Siobhán Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Aon Amharc ar Éirinn: Gaelic Families and their Manuscripts* (Dublin, 2013), pp. 5-11.

⁸ Colum Hourihane, *Gothic Art in Ireland 1169-1550* (New Haven and London, 2003), pp. 115-37.

⁹ Katharine Simms, 'Propaganda use of the *Táin* in the Later Middle Ages', *Celtica* 15 (1983), pp. 142-9; 'The Barefoot kings: Literary Image and Reality in Later Medieval Ireland', *Proceedings of Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 30 (2010): pp. 1-21.

¹⁰ Elizabeth FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration in Gaelic Ireland c. 1100-1600: A Cultural Landscape Study* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 138-61.

¹¹ FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, pp. 1-12.

¹² Ó Floinn, 'The Norman Conquest', pp. 163-5.



Fig. 1 The Shrine of the Stowe Missal (Reproduced courtesy of the Board of Trustees National Museum of Ireland).

In the adjoining lordship of Éile (southern County Offaly) where the Gaelic sept of Uí Chearbhaill recovered most of their land in the fourteenth century, Tadhg Ó Cearbhaill, lord of that territory between 1380 and 1407, patronised additions to the mid twelfth-century shrine of the Book of Dimma, which include a large equal-armed cross raised over quadrants of openwork geometric

plaques on the front, with a small crucifixion scene superimposed on the cross. Strips of gilt silver that frame the front of the shrine are inscribed in Lombardic style, TATHEVS O KEARBVILL REI DE ELV MEIPSUM DEAVRAIT ('Tadhg Ua Cearbhaill, king of Éile had me gilt') and with dedications to the abbot of the local priory at Roscrea and to the goldsmith who fashioned the additions.¹³ The shrine as display object was an ideal medium to promote claims to kingship during a period characterised by the attrition of kingship and reactive Gaelic resurgence in the South Midlands and North Tipperary sept lands of Ireland.

One of the most significant insights into what constituted symbols of 'resurgence' for a Gaelic lord with immediate royal antecedents is a suite of three objects associated with the Mac Murchadha Caomhánach, lord of Leinster. These include the shrine of the Book of Moling, in addition to a crown lost since the eighteenth century which was known as the 'crown of the king of Leinster', and an Oliphant or ivory hunting horn commonly known as the 'Kavanagh Charter Horn'. The horn was modified and mounted as a drinking horn during the late fourteenth or fifteenth century. An ornamental brass rim mount with an inverted Gothic or black letter inscription and brass plates cast in the form of bird-like webbed feet were added to it, coinciding with a period of renewed claim to the overlordship of Leinster by the Mic Mhurchadha Caomhánaigh dynasty of south-east Ireland.¹⁴ Similar drinking vessels of ox or ivory horn with brass, copper or silver mounts were common in Northern Europe especially in Scandinavia during the fifteenth century.¹⁵

¹³ Hourihane, *Gothic Art in Ireland*, pp. 124-6; Ó Floinn, 'The Norman Conquest', p. 173.

¹⁴ Ragnall Ó Floinn, 'The Kavanagh "Charter Horn"', in Donnchadh Ó Corráin (ed.), *Irish Antiquity: Essays and Studies Presented to Professor M. J. O'Kelly* (Dublin, 1981), pp. 269-78.

¹⁵ Ó Floinn, 'The Kavanagh "Charter Horn"', pp. 272-3.



Fig 2. The Shrine of the Book of Moling (Reproduced Courtesy of the Board of Trustees National Museum of Ireland).

The ‘Charter Horn’ – a ceremonial drinking cup – has been described as ‘the only piece of Irish regalia to have survived the Middle Ages’,¹⁶ but the refurbished shrine of the Book of Moling with its donor inscription ‘ARTHURUS REX DOMINUS LAGENIE, ELNSDABE TILIA BARONI, ANNO DNI MILLIO QUADRIN GENTESI MO SCDO’ magnified beneath a crystal setting, at the centre of the front face of the shrine,¹⁷ also communicates the renewed claims of Art Mac Murchadha Caomhánach to the kingdom of Leinster in 1402. Both objects were probably contrived as ‘kingship’ effects in the same period.

The alterations made to book shrines encourages a view of them not just as art objects and religious artefacts of the Gaelic ‘revival’, but as ‘royal’ regalia used to invoke and publicly display claims to kingship by lords.

The *Pailís* as Kingly Residence

In his description of the ‘Gaelic revival’, James Lydon referred to it as happening ‘under the initiative of a new generation, which spurned the compromising attitude of their fathers. Its success was marked by a gradual recovery of lands that had been feudalised and by assimilation

¹⁶ Caption to the ‘Kavanagh Charter Horn in the Medieval Ireland exhibition at the National Museum of Ireland.

¹⁷ Thomas K. Abbott, ‘Note on the Book of Mulling, *Hermathena* 8/17 (1891), pp. 89-90.

of many settlers in varying degrees to the Gaelic way of life'.¹⁸ However, as Robin Frame has shown several Gaelic ruling families were not actually chased off their land during Anglo-Norman colonisation but remained on as rent payers to Anglo-Norman overlords. In the Anglo-Norman heartland of Leinster, for instance, the Mic Mhurchadha lords had stayed on their land in north Wexford, and during the fourteenth century Art Caomhánach, dynast of that family, had lordship over both Irish and colonial communities.¹⁹

The fact that several ruling families across the island remained on their patrimonial lands, affords an opportunity to explore the kinds of dwellings that they had during the late thirteenth and fourteenth century before the general, but not exclusive, gradual move towards tower-house living from the fifteenth century onward.²⁰ It also opens the way to a re-interpretation of the owner-occupiers of certain elite settlement forms, such as the moated site, on lands conventionally viewed as colonised and, interpreted erroneously, as thereby lost to Gaelic ruling families.

How did Gaelic elites with newly conferred status of lords express their authority in the settlement forms that they used? At the beginning of the fourteenth century the *pailís* makes its first appearance in Gaelic poetry as an elite building. The Irish *pailís* is variously translated as a palisade or stockade, a palisaded enclosure or fortress, a castle and a palace. It is a borrowing from Middle English (late twelfth to fifteenth century) *palis*,²¹ which itself may be loaned from Old French *palais*, *pales*, which in turn derives from medieval Latin *palacium* and latin *palātium*.²² Medieval Welsh *palas* and *plas* also relate to old French *palais* but can mean 'place' too, and it came to Wales with French after the Norman Conquest. In the Welsh context it most often refers to a mansion or manor house.²³

The place-name *pailís* occurs in all four provinces of Ireland (Fig. 3). Patrick O'Connor, using Deirdre and Laurence Flanagan's earlier distribution map of *pailís* place-names,²⁴ identified 44 instances of the word as prefix, suffix or middle element in Irish place-names, with unqualified occurrences (anglicised Pallas and Pallis) the most numerous. He adds that *pailís* 'enjoys best recurrence in the hybrid regions away from the strongest anglicised areas'.²⁵

¹⁸ James Lydon, 'A Land of War', in Art Cosgrove (ed.), *A New History of Ireland II: Medieval Ireland 1169–1534* (Oxford, 1987), p. 268.

¹⁹ Frame, 'Two Kings in Leinster', p. 173.

²⁰ Kieran O'Connor, *The Archaeology of Medieval Rural Settlement in Ireland*. Discovery Programme Monographs 3 (Dublin, 1998), p.102.

²¹ E.G. Quin, (ed.), *Dictionary of the Irish Language: Based Mainly on Old and Middle Irish Materials* (Dublin, 1990), p. 494 [172].

²² Robert K. Barnhart (ed.), *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology* (Edinburgh, 1988), p. 748.

²³ Gareth A. Bevan and Patrick J. O'Donovan (eds.), *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru: A Dictionary of the Welsh Language* 3 (Caerdydd, 1998), p. 2672, 2819.

²⁴ Flanagan, Deirdre and Flanagan, Laurence, *Irish Place Names* (Dublin, 1994), p. 130.

²⁵ Patrick J. O'Connor, *Atlas of Irish Place-Names* (Newcastle West, 2001), pp. 122-3.

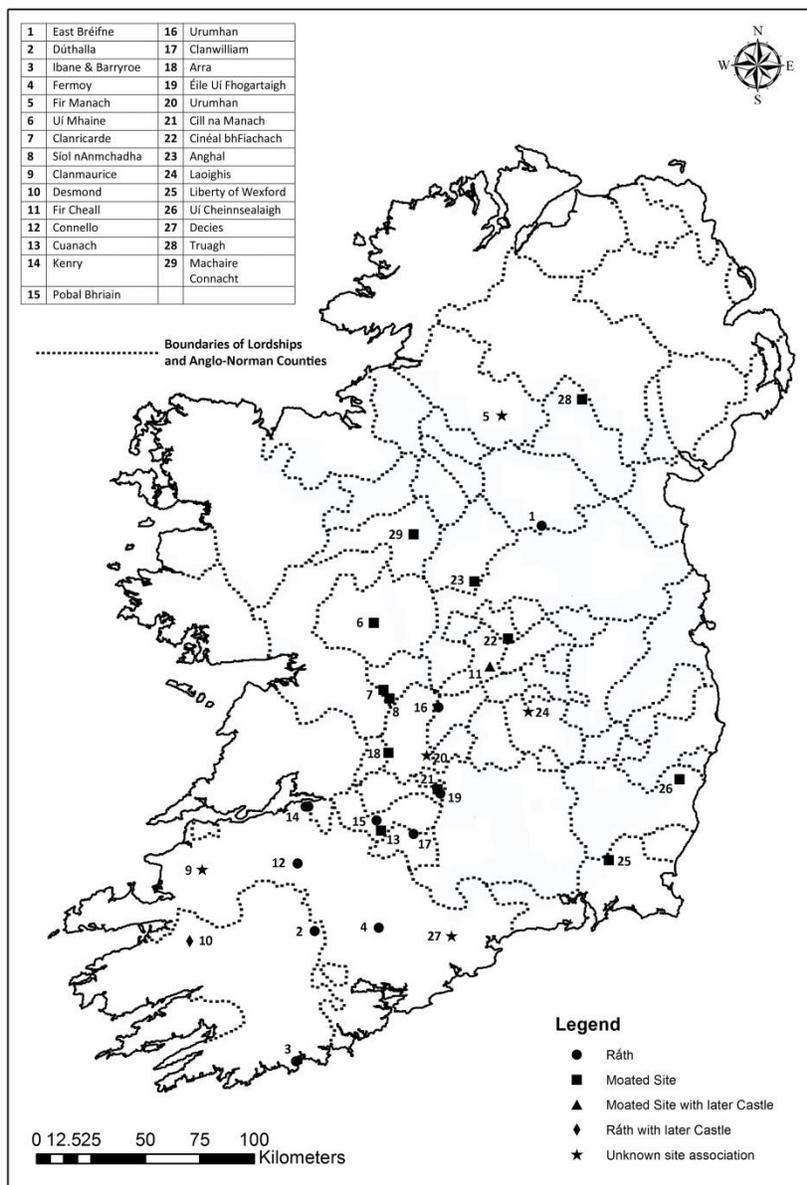


Fig. 3 Historical distribution of *pailís* place-name locations and associated field monuments, where known. Numbers refer to the territories in which they were situated (Drawing: Paul Naessens).

It should be noted that the instance of the place-name in O'Connor's map is artificially inflated by later subdivisions of those landholdings, commonly into upper, lower, east, west, big, little and its Irish forms 'beg' (from Irish *beag* meaning 'small') and 'more' (from Irish *mór* meaning big). Rationalised, the actual headcount of medieval landholdings with *pailís*-related place-names is 29, including three occurrences overlooked by O'Connor in Fermanagh, Monaghan and Roscommon (see below).

There is good reason to believe that a conventional reading of the word *pailís*, as ‘palisade or ‘stockade’ and an interpretation of what it means as ‘a circumscribed defensive structure from the colonising phase of Anglo-Norman settlement in Ireland’,²⁶ is too narrow and exclusive. Some of the *pailís* place-name locations explored in this paper support the idea that in a late thirteenth and fourteenth-century context, *pailís* implies an elaborate timber hall befitting a king but used by a Gaelic lord. Kenneth Fergusson in his discussion of the place-name has suggested that it may have specifically designated a banqueting hall of rectangular plan.²⁷ The process by which the word was first adopted and used in Ireland in the high medieval period is unclear, but its introduction is probably the result of Anglo-Norman influence. Subsequently, it was applied to particular landholdings in both colonised and un-colonised territories of the island (Fig. 3) and it is detectable today in the various anglicised name forms of *pailís* given to some Irish townlands. Who named those landholdings is unknown, but it was perhaps the learned families of Gaelic lords, an elite cohort within service families that supported the household of the lord. More particularly, it may have been the poets and/or keepers of *senchas* or traditional history who applied this august toponym to mark the timber halls and feasting venues of their lords.

The term *pailís* is used in the ‘house-poems’ composed in praise of new dwellings of particular lords in the early fourteenth century. The house of Aodh Ó Conchobhair, lord of Machaire Chonnacht, which was built sometime during his lordship, between 1293 when he first assumed power, and 1306 when it was attacked and burned, is described as a *pailís* in two poems dated by Simms to the early fourteenth century.²⁸ The poems *Tomhur mhúir Chruachna i gCluain Fraoich* and *An tú arís, a ráith Teamhrach?* use the term *pailís* as a device to communicate a view of the Ó Conchobhair’s house as a palace befitting a king. In *Tomhur mhúir* it is described as a ‘strong fair-halled palace\ palace of kings and poets [*Pailís bríoghmhar ar bhláith brugh\ráith na Ríoghradh ráith na sgoi*’²⁹ and in *An tú arís* the poet over-reaches himself and compares the dwelling to the ‘Resplendent palace of the Lion of Colt [*Pailís Ionrach leomain Chuilt*’.³⁰ The certainty that the word was current and used of an elite building is compounded by place-name evidence from the sixteenth century which reveals that the correct title of the landholding in which Ó Conchobhair’s dwelling had been situated was ‘Palishclonfrey’, a corruption of the Irish *Pailís Cluain Fraoich* and translated as the ‘Palace of Fraoch’s water-meadow’.³¹ The same source indicates that as late as 1594, service families of the Ó Conchobhair lord of Machaire Chonnacht

²⁶ O’Connor, *Atlas of Irish Place-Names*, pp. 122-3.

²⁷ Kenneth Ferguson, ‘Castles and the Pallas Placename: A German Insight’, *The Irish Sword* 22/89 (2001), p. 247.

²⁸ Katharine Simms, ‘Native Sources for Gaelic Settlement: The House Poems’, in Patrick J. Duffy, David Edwards and Elizabeth FitzPatrick (eds.), *Gaelic Ireland c. 1250 – c. 1650: Land, Lordship and Settlement* (Dublin, 2001), p. 257.

²⁹ Lambert McKenna (ed. and trans.), ‘Poem to Clonfree Castle’, *Irish Monthly* 51/606 (1923), p. 644.

³⁰ Edmund Crosby Quiggin (ed. and trans), ‘O’Conor’s House at Cloonfree’, in Edmund Crosby Quiggin (ed.), *Essays and Studies Presented to William Ridgeway* (Cambridge, 1913), 336, 337.

³¹ Kenneth W. Nicholls (ed.), *Irish Fiants of the Tudor Sovereigns 1586-1603*, 4 (Dublin, 1994), p. 242 [5888]; This place-name is not included in Patrick O’Connor’s map of *pailís* placenames – see O’Connor, *Atlas of Irish Place-Names*, p. 122.

remained on that landholding long after the *pailís* had been vacated by the Ó Conchobhair in favour of a stone castle.

Aside from Pailís Cluain Fraoich, there are three other instances of *pailís* place-names in Connacht. These are in the Uí Cheallaigh lordship of Uí Mhaine, in the Uí Mhadáin lordship of Síol nAnmchadha in east county Galway, and in what became the Burke lordship of Clanricarde (Fig. 3). Frame has noted that an extent of the lands of the Anglo-Norman de Burgh overlord, taken in 1333, indicates the tentative hold that the colonists had over large tracts of the Connacht landscape. The land was controlled by no more than a handful of Anglo-Norman sub-tenants who had ‘inserted themselves above the Irish population’ and who lived alongside Gaelic lords such as the Uí Cheallaigh of Uí Mhaine and the Uí Mhadáin of Síol nAnmchadha ‘who continued to do the same thing, while owing rent to their colonial overlords’.³² In Connacht, rather than dispossessing Gaelic rulers of their lands, the Anglo-Norman de Burghs and de Berminghams, acted as their overlords.

A large moated site known as ‘Lismore’ south of the Clonbrock River in the townland of Pallas, near the Franciscan Friary of Kilconnell in east County Galway, is the likely location of the *pailís* of the Ó Ceallaigh lord of Uí Mhaine during the fourteenth century. In keeping with the trend for service families to be found in close proximity to, or re-occupying, *pailís* settlements, the townland of Pallas is adjoined immediately to the south by the townlands of Ballydoogan (‘the place of Ó Dubhagháin’) and Cartrondoogan that constituted the landholding of the Uí Dhubhagháin poets to the Ó Ceallaigh lord. On their lands a lavish feast for the ‘poets, brehons, bards, harpers, gamesters, jesters’ of Ireland, hosted by Uilliam Ó Ceallaigh lord of Uí Mhaine, was held in 1351. The fourteenth-century poem *Filidh Éireann go haointeach*, composed by Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh (d. 1387) celebrates the generosity of the host.³³

Pailís place-names also occur in the south Ulster lordships of Méig Uidhir of Fir Manach, Uí Raghallaigh of East Bréifne and Méig Chionaodha of Truagh, in the respective modern counties of Fermanagh, Cavan and Monaghan (Fig. 3). A strong measure of control was retained by the Gaelic ruling families of those territories at the height of Anglo-Norman colonial dominance in the first half of the thirteenth century. Patrick O’Connor’s map of *pailís* place-names includes Mount Pallas in the parish of Kilbride, Co. Cavan, close to the border with Co. Meath, which he claims as ‘a sort of clarion outlier in the midlands’,³⁴ but he omits those for Fermanagh and Monaghan, which otherwise provide a fuller picture of the phenomenon in south Ulster and have important implications for expressions of lordly authority in the marches of Ulster. Siobhán McDermott’s study of the landscape archaeology of the Méig Chionaodha lordship of Truagh identified the *pailís*, implicit in the local townland name Pullis, Co. Monaghan, as the site of a *ráth* or earthen enclosure and possible timber hall.³⁵ The place-name ‘Palyst’ [sic *Pailís*], in the

³² Robin Frame, *Colonial Ireland 1169-1369* (Dublin, 1981), p. 100.

³³ Eleanor Knott (ed. and trans.), ‘Filidh Éireann go hAointeach’, *Ériu* 5 (1911), pp. 50-69.

³⁴ O’Connor, *Atlas of Irish Place-Names*, p. 123.

³⁵ Siobhán McDermott, ‘The Archaeology of the Twelve Tates of McKenna, c.1591’, *Clogher Record* 20/2 (2010), pp. 373-406.

lordship of Fir Manach, is preserved in a Tudor fiant of 1594 in which it was, at that time, connected with the Meic Gafraidh who were vassals of the Méig Uidhir lords of Fir Manach.³⁶

Pailís as a place-name is also found in Leinster, in the modern counties of Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath and their cognate Gaelic lordships of Laoighis (Uí Mhórdha), Anghal (Uí Fhearghail) Fir Cheall (Uí Mhaolmhuaidh) and Cinéal bhFiachach (Méig Eochagáin). The place-name occurs in the southeast of Ireland, in the Anglo-Norman Liberty of Wexford, close to the border with the territory of Uí Cheinnsealaigh, and it occurs again in Uí Cheinnsealaigh, in the rough land of north Wexford, bordering Wicklow which, at the height of colonisation, had been retained by the Irish king Domnall Cáemánach Mac Murchadha in return for which he served the Anglo-Norman lordship of Leinster as seneschal of the 'Irish of Leinster'.³⁷

In Munster, which experienced highly variable intensities of Anglo-Norman colonisation, with reassertion of Gaelic dominance in some territories, in north Tipperary, especially in the second half of the fourteenth century, several *pailís* locations have been recorded (Fig. 3). Six *pailís* place-names are found in Tipperary, in the northern lordships of Uí Dhubhuidhir of Cill na Manach, Uí Cheinnéidigh of Urumhan, Uí Bhriain of Pobal Bhriain, Mac Uí Bhriain Arra and Uí Fhógartaigh of Éile Uí Fhógartaigh, and in the lordship of the Anglo-Norman Burke of Clanwilliam. *Pailís* place-names are also found in the Munster counties of Cork, Kerry, Limerick, on the former lands of Uí Chaoimh of Dúthalla and Barry Roe of Ibane in Cork, Fitzmaurice of Clanmaurice and Mic Carthaigh of Desmond, Co. Kerry, Meic Uí Bhriain of Cuanach and Fitzgerald of Desmond in Co. Limerick.

Analysis of the distribution of *pailís* names (Fig. 3) indicates that the majority are disposed to boundary zones between major territories, and to frontiers between significant colonial monuments and Gaelic lands. There is also a concentration in the Midlands and North Tipperary where colonial settlement was thin and the Gaelic septs remained intact. The presence of *pailís* in boundary areas strongly indicates that they may have been used as high-status markers in the configuration or reaffirmation of Gaelic sept boundaries. As Adrian Empey has explained 'Even in the heyday of the colony the position of the settlement in the north [of Tipperary] was under threat from the indigenous Irish' and although 'they may have been forced to yield ground, they retained a wide measure of autonomy even within the framework of the great capital manors'.³⁸ Where Gaelic leaders such as Uí Cheinnéidigh of Urumhan, Uí Chearbhaill of Éile, Uí Dhubhuidhir of Cill na Manach, Uí Bhriain of Pobal Bhriain, Mac Uí Bhriain Arra and Uí Fhógartaigh of Éile Uí Fhógartaigh remained on their lands and retained their traditional forms of social and political organisation, their 'resurgence' during the fourteenth century was especially visible. As described above, Pilib Ó Ceinnéidigh, lord of Urumhan, expressed that political recovery by styling himself as 'king of Urumhan' on the fourteenth-century refurbished face of the shrine of the Stowe Missal (Fig. 1). Likewise, Tadhg Ó Cearbhaill, lord of the neighbouring territory of Éile ensured a visible display of his self-styled status as 'king of Éile' in the inscription on the front face of the shrine of

³⁶ Nicholls, *Irish Fiant*s, p. 242 [5888].

³⁷ Kevin Down, 'Colonial Society and Economy in the High Middle Ages', in Art Cosgrove (ed.), *A New History of Ireland II: Medieval Ireland 1169-1534* (Oxford, 1987), p. 445.

³⁸ Adrian Empey, 'The Norman Period, 1185-1500', in William Nolan and Thomas G. McGrath (eds), *Tipperary: History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* (Dublin, 1985), pp. 86-7.

the Book of Dimma. With such a visible parade of kingship claims in art objects of this period, it is likely that the reason for the border geography of the *pailís* is not defensive but arguably to make a highly visible statement about claims to territory and political recovery on the part of Gaelic dynasties. In respect of a relationship between boundary zones and *pailís* locations, it should be pointed out that while neither Pailís Cluain Fraoich nor the *pailís* of the Uí Cheallaigh of Uí Mhaine, in Connacht, are located on major territorial boundaries, they were both situated in frontier areas in terms of their proximity to key colonial monuments and settlements. Pailís Cluain Fraoich and the nearby Uí Chonchobhair assembly place of Carn Fraoich were within easy reach of the royal fortress of the English king at Roscommon, and Ballintober Castle which was built by the Anglo-Norman de Burgh earls of Ulster.³⁹ It can be concluded that *pailís*, as used in place-names, is current predominantly in Gaelic-dominated territories, and in colonised areas where Gaelic lords were not moved off their lands but paid rents to Anglo-Norman overlords and in some instances recovered full liberty of their lands. While the word itself is adopted from Middle-English/Old French, its presence does not necessarily signal an Anglo-Norman settlement form but rather a term borrowed into the Irish language from Anglo-Norman society. What is clear is that the application of this word to medieval landholdings in the Irish landscape had a demonstrable meaning. While it is difficult on the basis of a place-name alone to distinguish between *pailís* as ‘palace’ and the more prosaic ‘palisade’, the surviving archaeology, literature and historical geography associated with some of these place-names suggests that the place-name *pailís* can distinguish a palace or mansion of a lord with recent royal ancestors and kingly pretensions. The use of the term must have carried some authority or was designed for that purpose in the changing circumstances of Gaelic elites who, while making political recoveries as lords, lost their status as kings during the later thirteenth and fourteenth century.

The field monuments, from which the majority of *pailís* landholdings derive their name, appear to be the *ráth* (circular space enclosed by one or more earthen banks and fosses)⁴⁰ and the moated site. There is no geographical distinction between them, with the majority of the *ráth* sites also found in territorial boundary and frontier zones and in the lordships of the Midlands and North Tipperary (Fig. 3). It should be noted that the true extent of medieval landholdings are not always consistent with townland units, and that a likely *pailís* field monument is sometimes found in a townland adjoining the one that carries the reference to the *pailís*. Also, multiple enclosures occur in some *pailís*-named landholdings and it is therefore impossible to identify which is the likely candidate outside of using size and earthwork defenses as a measure of status.

Of interest is the fact that moated sites occur in 13 of the 29 instances of the place-name location, another six may relate to large enclosures. Two are associated with later tower houses which appear to have succeeded the respective *pailís*, at Pallaspark in Ballyboy, Co. Offaly where the Ó Maoilmuidh lord’s tower house was built on a large moated platform which may have enclosed an earlier timber hall, and at Pallis Maguinhy, Co. Kerry where a tower house was

³⁹ Rory McNeary and Brian Shanahan, ‘Medieval Settlement, Society and Land Use in the Roscommon Area, an Introduction’, in Niall Brady (ed.), *North Roscommon in the Later Medieval Period: An Introduction*, Discovery Programme Reports 7 (Dublin, 2005), pp.3-4.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth FitzPatrick, ‘Native Enclosed Settlement and the Problem of the Irish “Ring-fort”’, *Medieval Archaeology* 53 (2009), pp. 271-307.

constructed just 70m north of a large *ráth*. In all of the remaining cases the identity of the field monument related to the *pailís* is uncertain (Fig. 3). A particular challenge in proving the identity of a *pailís* in the field arises where both a moated site and a large *ráth* occur on the same medieval landholding. This is the case in Anghal (County Longford), where a large *ráth* is located in the subdivision of Pallas More and a moated site borders the River Inny in the adjoining subdivision of Pallas Beg. Pailís was a seat of the Uí Fhearghail Buidhe. A chronicle entry for 1476 records that ‘a great army of the English of Meath marched into Magh-Breaghmaine [Barony of Shrule, Co. Longford] ...and took possession of Pailís ...’⁴¹

It can be tentatively argued that about a third of the *pailís* mapped in Fig. 3 are synonymous with timber halls on moated sites and that some of the remainder are perhaps timber halls on the platforms of the more traditional *ráth*. This in turn might suggest that some Gaelic lords were building new timber dwellings within traditional native settlement forms during the late thirteenth and fourteenth century.⁴² The rest of the locations have no upstanding remains of field monuments. No *pailís* has yet been excavated and therefore there is a tendency to rely on poetic descriptions of timber halls to elicit their form. Katharine Simms has warned about extracting ‘definite information’ from the house poems because they deliberately invoke fanciful comparisons with heroic and supernatural palaces.⁴³ Nonetheless, mindful of this caution, Tom Finan and Kieran O’Conor have attempted to excise the appearance of the *pailís* of Aodh Ó Conchobhair of Cluain Fraoich from the late fourteenth-century poems *Tomhur mhúir Chruachna i gCluain Fraoich* and *An tú arís, a ráith Teamhrach?* The ‘blue moat’ described as enclosing the site in the first poem, is interpreted by them as a ‘wet fosse’ surrounding the moated site identified as the *pailís* in Cloonfree townland (Fig. 4). Both poems imply that the *pailís* had a single earthen bank as a defense which is at variance with the field evidence which indicates two banks and an intervening fosse. However, Finan and O’Conor suggest that the external bank could have been a secondary addition to the site.⁴⁴ Led by the poetic references, they speculate too that the entrance to the moated platform was ‘defended by a two-storey wooden tower, which rested on dry-stone footings’, and that the timber house, a banqueting hall, was built of wattles, provided with windows, and that the roof was cruck-built and thatched.⁴⁵

⁴¹ John O’Donovan (ed. and trans.) *Annala Rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616*, 4 (Dublin, 1856), pp. 1100, 1101.

⁴² I have discussed the vexed question of the chronology of native enclosed settlements elsewhere. See FitzPatrick, ‘Native Enclosed Settlement’, pp.277-83.

⁴³ Simms, ‘Native Sources’, p. 256.

⁴⁴ Tom Finan and Kieran O’Conor, ‘The Moated Site at Cloonfree, Co. Roscommon’, *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* 54 (2002), p. 79.

⁴⁵ Finan and O’Conor, ‘The Moated Site’, pp. 80-81.



Fig. 4 Pailís Cluain Fraoch, ‘palace of Fraoich’s meadow’, identified as a moated site in the townland of Cloonfree, County Roscommon.

Terry Barry’s early work on moated sites, published between 1977 and 1996, proposed that they were defended manor houses of minor Anglo-Norman gentry during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries,⁴⁶ while Adrian Empey believed that they belonged to a secondary phase of Anglo-Norman settlement between 1225 and 1325.⁴⁷ The orthodox opinion that moated sites were exclusive to and synonymous with Anglo-Norman settlement in Ireland has been greatly moderated by the work of Kieran O’Conor who has demonstrated that the moated site was the preferred residence of some Gaelic elites in areas of Connacht and particularly in the Uí Chonchobhair lordship of Machaire Chonnacht, the core of which did not experience Anglo-Norman settlement.⁴⁸ The synonymy between the moated site and the *pailís* observed in this paper broadens the debate to include moated sites found in areas where Gaelic lords stayed on their lands and paid rent to Anglo-Norman overlords, and also to moated sites found at locations where Gaelic lords recovered lands during the retreat of the colony from the mid-thirteenth century onward.

After Anglo-Norman colonists began to retreat from the ‘wooded and boggy areas of the midlands, north Tipperary and southeast of Ireland, where a manorial framework had earlier been sketched out’,⁴⁹ Gaelic lords consolidated their personal demesnes and their authority over

⁴⁶ Terry Barry, *Medieval Moated Sites of South-East Ireland* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 101-2; Terry Barry, ‘Rural Settlement in Ireland in the Middle Ages: An Overview?’, *Ruralia*, p. 137; Terry Barry, ‘The Defensive Nature of Irish Moated Sites’, in John R. Kenyon and Kieran O’Conor (eds.), *The Medieval Castle in Ireland and Wales* (Dublin, 2005), pp. 182-93.

⁴⁷ Adrian Empey, ‘Medieval Knocktopher: A Study in Manorial Settlement – Part 1’, *Old Kilkenny Review* 2/4 (1982), p. 335.

⁴⁸ Kieran O’Conor, ‘The Morphology of Gaelic Lordly Sites in North Connacht’, in Patrick J. Duffy, David Edwards and Elizabeth FitzPatrick (eds), *Gaelic Ireland: Land, Lordship and Settlement c. 1250–c. 1650* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 338-45; Kieran O’Conor, ‘The Ethnicity of Moated Sites’, *Ruralia* 3 (2000), pp. 92-102.

⁴⁹ Frame, ‘Two Kings in Leinster’, p. 158

their lordship boundaries. Typical among these was Art Caomhánach Mac Mhurchadha, who having remained in possession of his family's lands in north Wexford, exercised lordship over both Irish and colonial communities.⁵⁰ It has already been shown that Art had the shrine of the Book of Moling refurbished in 1402 and, with great ostentation, he as donor was commemorated in the inscription beneath the crystal that dominates the front of the shrine (Fig. 2).⁵¹ The core of the early medieval patrimonial lands of his Uí Cheinnsealaigh ancestors was North Wexford near the border with Wicklow (Fig. 3), a location that is distinguished by the former assembly place of the sept in Loggan Lower townland, and southwest of which are the townlands of Pallishill, Pallis Upper and Pallis Lower where some of the service families of Uí Cheinnsealaigh lived as late as the sixteenth century. Foremost among those service families were the Meic Eochadha,⁵² hereditary poets and inaugurators of the Uí Cheinnsealaigh ruling family. Their role in that respect is encapsulated in the place-name of the assembly site, Leac Mhic Eochadha, as recorded by Geoffrey Keating.⁵³ West of Pallis, and southwest of Loggan Lower, there is a group of townlands around Buckstown House Demesne that are named — Knocknagapple ('hill of the horses'), Racecourse, Deerpark. These, together with the assembly place, the *pailís* celebrated in the townlands of that name and the presence of the landholding of the poet-inaugurator, point to the dynastic centre of the Uí Cheinnsealaigh. The coincidence of the place-name *pailís* with a moated site (Fig. 5), hunting grounds and the assembly place of a Gaelic ruling family makes a compelling case for the identity of the *pailís* as the status building of choice.

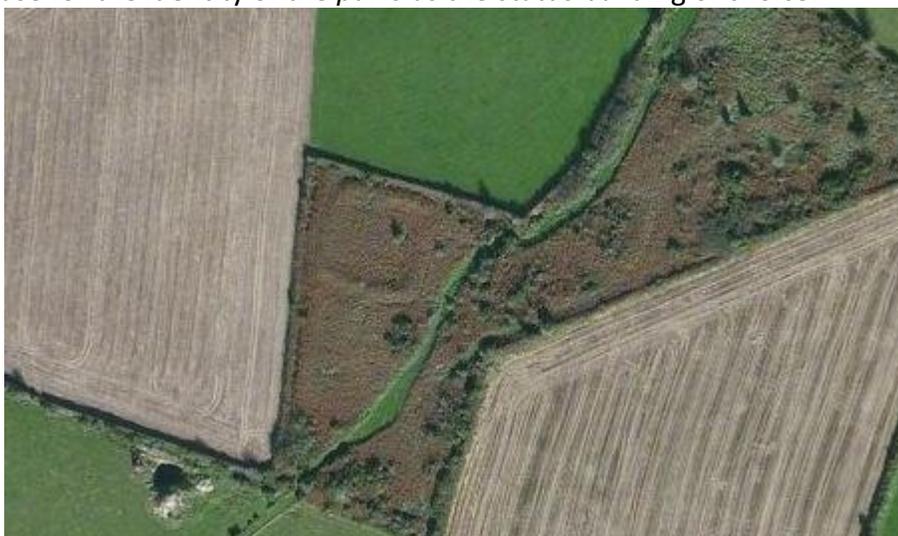


Fig. 5 The ploughed-over remains of a moated site, possibly the site of the *pailís*, in the townland of Pallis Lower, County Wexford.

⁵⁰ Frame, 'Two Kings in Leinster', p. 173.

⁵¹ Thomas K. Abbott, 'Note on the Book of Mulling', *Hermathena* 8/17 (1891), p. 89.

⁵² Thomas F. O'Rahilly, 'Irish Poets, Historians, and Judges in English Documents, 1538-1615, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy Section C36* (1922), p. 91.

⁵³ Patrick S. Dinneen (ed. and trans), *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* 3. Irish Texts Society 15 (London, 1914), pp. 14-15; FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, pp. 91-2, 104.

Conclusion

During the later medieval period in Ireland, Gaelic lords continued to publicly identify themselves as immediate descendants of kings through carefully chosen elements of material culture. Evocations of Gaelic kingship in the material record of the fourteenth and early fifteenth century have traditionally been seen as evidence of ‘revival’, a period of renewal imbued with ‘a new spirit of confidence’.⁵⁴ The uncritical use of terms like ‘revival’ and ‘resurgence’ has somewhat impeded a more complex perspective on the behavior of Gaelic elites in this period. The phenomenon of ‘revival’, viewed over a century or more, may have an alternative appreciation as an attempt by Gaelic dynasties to display their royal lineage with varying degrees of impact during a profound period of change when their status declined irretrievably to that of lords. What emerged was a greatly refashioned concept of what it was to be Gaelic and elite.

There is some evidence to suggest that the Irish *pailís* can be identified in particular instances as a timber hall of a Gaelic lord with immediate royal predecessors and kingly pretensions during the late thirteenth and fourteenth century. Feasting, and the power display associated with that activity, may have been the primary role of the *pailís*. The geography of the majority of *pailís* locations is liminal suggesting, perhaps, that they were intended as feasting venues marking key frontier areas, and boundary zones of sept lands and nascent Gaelic lordships. A strong argument can be made for the identification of moated sites as the location of *pailís* or timber halls of Gaelic lords on the basis of their political geography and records of the presence of Gaelic household service families at these places. One of the most compelling cases for the association of a moated site with a lordly *pailís* is Pailís Cluain Fraoich in Machaire Chonnacht. That identification is supported by two early fourteenth-century house-poems and sixteenth-century evidence for the place-name Pailís Cluain Fraoich and the presence of service families of the Uí Chonchobhair on that landholding. The association of the moated site of Lismore with Uilliam Ó Ceallaigh, lord of Uí Mhaine, is strengthened by the presence of the Uí Dhubhagháin poets and historians to the Uí Cheallaigh in that landscape and by the geography and settlement features communicated in a mid-fourteenth century poem in praise of Uilliam’s Christmas feast. Such service families would have been involved in high-status entertainments for their lords. The combination of *pailís* place-name, moated site, assembly place and hunting grounds, and the presence of the bardic family of Meic Eochadha, in the landscape of northern Uí Cheinnsealaigh, points to the old royal demesne lands and mensal lands of that territory, and to what may have been a *pailís* feasting venue for the Mic Murchadha Caomhánaigh.

The identification of *pailís* in the territories of Gaelic septs suggests that the construction of palatial timber halls, possibly for feasting, on moated sites and *ráths*, was an expression of the survival of Gaelic culture through and alongside Anglo-Norman colonisation, and subsequent political recovery. However, such expressions of recovery and authority, in the remodeling of shrines and the construction of halls, might also be viewed as reactive rather than propitious since what had been lost was not regained but steadily and eventually refashioned as lordship.

⁵⁴ Ó Floinn, ‘The Norman Conquest’, p.185.

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