<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>Ollamh, biatach, comharba: lifeways of Gaelic learned families in medieval and early modern Ireland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>FitzPatrick, Elizabeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publication Date</strong></td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publisher</strong></td>
<td>Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Link to publisher's version</strong></td>
<td><a href="https://books.dias.ie/index.php?main_page=product_info&amp;products_id=382">https://books.dias.ie/index.php?main_page=product_info&amp;products_id=382</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Item record</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10379/5947">http://hdl.handle.net/10379/5947</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An XIV Comhdháil Idirnáisiúnta sa Léann Ceilteach

MAIGH NUAD 2011

IMEACHTAÍ

PROCEEDINGS

XIV International Congress of Celtic Studies

MAYNOOTH 2011

EAGARTHÓIRÍ

LIAM BREATNACH, RUARÍ Ó HÚIGINN,
DAMIAN McMANUS, KATHARINE SIMMS

EDITORS
An XIV Comhdháil Idirnáisiúnta
sa Léann Ceilteach

MAIGH NUAD 2011

IMEACHTAÍ

EAGARTHÓIRÍ
LIAM BREATNACH, RUAIRÍ Ó hUIGINN,
DAMIAN McMANUS AND KATHARINE SIMMS
EDITORS

PROCEEDINGS

XIV International Congress
of Celtic Studies

MAYNOOTH 2011
OLLMHI, BIATACH, COMHARBA: LIFEWAYS OF GAEIC LEARNED FAMILIES IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN IRELAND

ELIZABETH FITZPATRICK
School of Geography and Archaeology, NUI Galway

INTRODUCTION

Research on the manuscripts produced by Gaelic learned professions is a distinguished area of Celtic scholarship which has traditionally focused on biographies of particular learned families or individual learned men1 and the products of their schools.2 The learned classes and their works have also been given new contexts in recent scholarship. Katharine Simms has pioneered ways in which poetry can be used to inform landscape and economy, dwellings and warfare, and Damian McManus has proposed a setting for the grammatical tracts, through his exploration of the environment of the bardic school.3

The aim of this paper is to open discussion about the physical environments in which learned families lived, farmed and conducted schools, specifically through an exploration of their settlement archaeology, landholdings and the place-names associated with them. Those elements are integral to understanding the role and identity of the learned professions in later medieval and early modern Irish society to c.1600. A landscape approach also suggests that partial views of earlier royal settlements can be achieved through the lens of later medieval learned

family holdings, and that the ways in which they used their land may have informed the composition of later demesnes in particular landscapes of early modern Ireland.

An ollamh (master of a learned or skilled profession), always male, and the representative of his sept, combined several roles, especially in the case of those who conducted schools of senchas and poetry. Generally, he did not confine himself to his primary hereditary profession but crossed over into areas of allied traditional arts. Simms has shown that the poetic art was studied in law schools, and that poetic judges of Brehon law were a feature of the learned classes. Manuscripts of the schools also tended to contain a broad range of material, not just profession-specific texts. In the sixteenth century, the Úi Dhubh ðá Bhoireann law school at Cathair Mhic Neachtain in the Burren uplands of Co. Clare had the ‘Amra Choluim Chille’, for instance, among its manuscript collections. It was copied in 1552 by a scribe called Forannán for his patron, Mac Fhlannchadha, who conducted a law school at Cnoc Fiann in Baile Mheic Fhlannchadha on the Atlantic coast of southwest Clare. A colophon (fol. 12vb) reveals the scribe’s name, the date of composition of the manuscript and the places where it was compiled:

A prayer for him who wrote this book from the beginning to the end. In Cathair Mheic Neachtain near Ara na mBreó it was begun, and its completion [was] in Baile Mheic Fhlannchadha, near my patron, i.e. Domhnall Óg Mac Fhlannchadha. I am Forannán, who wrote this for him and for every one God would wish [to see it]. And the age of the Lord is: twelve years and two twenties and five hundred and one thousand years [AD 1552] up to next Christmas; today it is a fortnight before the 1st of November.  

Hybridity in learned roles can also be perceived in family names, such as Mac an Ghabhann (MacGowan) which translates as ‘son of the smith’. Two distinguished branches of this family were respective traditional historians to the Úi Chinnéidigh of Urmhumhá Íochtarach and to the Úi Lochlainn of Bhoireann. Mac Raith Mac an Ghabhann na Sgéal was the principal scribe of a number of genealogies of Irish saints and kings, copied during the

---

7 K. Simms, ‘The poetic brehon lawyers of early sixteenth-century Ireland’, Éirithe 57 (2007), 121–32: 121–2. Simms explains that two words were used to describe the privileged arts: ‘dán’, which meant primarily a talent, a gift from God; and ‘cerd’, which meant rather a craft, an acquired skill.

8 Orat don te ro scribh in leabhar sa o thus co deireadh. A Cathair Meic Nechtain a farrad Ara na mBreó a toriscndad; g a forbh a mBaile McClaneadada a farrad mo goisde. i Domhnall Óg Ma (d) Clannadada. Mise Forandán qui scrbist sin do fein. Dag ach aon darbh toid do Dia is i ais in Domáini. t. 2 blíadain, x. x. d. xx.iit. i.e.c. 0000 [leg. 1000] blíadnua [= 1552] cuin in Nodlaig so cugam, caicius ria Samuin odie. RIA Ms. Stowe C III 2 [1236]; Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy (Dublin, 1926–70), 3422. I am very grateful to Jacopo Bisagni (NU1, Galway) for this translation and for drawing my attention to the colophon.

8 AFM 1425.12; ‘Mac Gowan of the Stories, i.e. Thomas, son of Gilla-na-naeiv Mac Gowan, Ollav to O’Loughlin of Corcomroe in history, died’.
used their land may have
in particular landscapes of
profession), always male, and
roles, especially in the case
of poetry. Generally, he did
professor but crossed over
town that the poetic art was
Breton law were a feature
also tended to contain a
ific texts. In the sixteenth
school at Cathair Mhíc
e had the ‘Arma Choluim
It was copied in 1552
Mac Fhlanachdha, who
vheic Fhlanachdha on the
on (fol. 12vb) reveals the
manuscript and the places
in the beginning to the end.
Breó it was begun, and its
hadha, near my patron, i.e.
 Caterán, who wrote this for
see it). And the age of the
five hundred and one
maráin, which meant rather a craft, as
Cathair Meic Nechtain a farrad Ais
farrad mo goistsie a Domhnall Og
dag ach son darbh toil do Día - is i
[180] Muirinna [= 1552] cuimhneach
[112] 2 [1236]; Catalogue of Irish
3,422. I am very grateful to Jacopi
ng my attention to the colophon
s, son of Gilla-na-naev Mac Gowan,
mid-fourteenth century for Giolla Ruadháin Ua Macáin, comharba of the
church of St Ruadhán of Lorrrha in Urmhunna Iscatharach.11 The Ormond
Meic an Ghabhann are associated with Béal Atha Ghabhann (Ballygown),
remembered in the townland names Ballygown north and south at
Silvermines in Co. Tipperary. This duality or overlapping of areas of
expertise, in families that have their origins as smiths, is a 'syndrome
especially evident in the mythical figure of Finn' as poet and outsider who
possesses the power and wisdom of the poet or fhi, but who also has access
to legal knowledge and the craft of the smith.12

Apart from being a master, practitioner and custodian of several arts,
it is often the case that an ollamh was also a hereditary comharba (heir to the
authority and revenues of the founder of a church) or an airchimneach
(steward of church lands and buildings), and a biatach (food provider/
hospitalier) or fear tioge aoidheadh (guest-house keeper).13 This kind of
multi-faceted, kin-based, hereditary official is unique to Celtic societies in
medieval and early modern Europe.

Equally remarkable is the survival of some of the remains of the
settlements of these families and the potential to determine land-use on
their holdings through place-names, topography and standing archaeological features. This evidence, used in combination with native chronicle
entries, bardic poetry and English administrative sources of the sixteenth
and seventeenth century, enables a partial reconstruction of their lifeways.

LANDHOOLDING AND LANDUSE

Determining whether a particular learned family's holding was on mensal
land (lucht tighe), termon land, or on the sept lands of a lordship can be
difficult, but sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English administrative
documents, especially inquisitions, films and maps, sometimes locate
members of the learned profession within the Gaelic landholding matrix.
It is often the case too that branches of learned families can be found at
significant distances from their original patrimonies, as a result of having
found new patrons. The Uí Dháláigh of Muinter Bháire in the lordship of
Fionn Iartrachar, within the Mac Carthaigh Rhiabhach overlordship of
Caibre in west Cork, and the Mac an Bhaírd of Ballymacaward in the
lordship of Tír Conaill, are typical examples of such migrations, with
the former originating with the sept of that name in the midland territory of
Teathbha, and the latter being a branch of Meic an Bhaírd of Uí Mhainse.

11 J.F. Nagy, The wisdom of the outlaw: the Boydheid deeds of Finn in Gaelic narrative
tradition (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985), 33.
12 C.M. O'Sullivan, in a discussion of 'Hospitality and the Irish guesthouse-keeper', in
Hospitality in medieval Ireland 900–1500 (Dublin, 2004), 120–1, notes that ‘the term biatach,
simply denoting one who supplies food to another, also appears quite frequently throughout
the sources for the period under consideration to describe not only the hospitalier, but also
the various other types of guesthouse-keepers in medieval Ireland'.

11 Cathair Meic Nechtain a farrad Ais
farrad mo goistsie a Domhnall Og
dag ach son darbh toil do Día - is i
[180] Muirinna [= 1552] cuimhneach
[112] 2 [1236]; Catalogue of Irish
3,422. I am very grateful to Jacopi
ng my attention to the colophon
s, son of Gilla-na-naev Mac Gowan,

Place-names can also be particularly useful identifiers of lands associated with learned families and can accentuate the synonymy between genealogy and landholding that characterises the geography of Gaelic Ireland. Several of the place-names of learned family landholdings combine the word baile (place) with the family name, as can be seen in Table 1.

These often survive as townland names, but the land denominations concerned may have originally been larger—quarters or ballybetaghscovering a greater area than suggested by the name-associated townland. Some of the historically recovered place-names of these learned family holdings have either become detached from their original denominations or they are now obsolete. Ballymackegan, the landholding of the Meic Aodhagáin brehons who served the Ó Fearghail Buidhe of Pallas, in law, in the Southern Anghaile (west and south Longford) lordship of Ó Fearghail Buidhe, is a case where the landholding place-name became extinct. Ballymackegan is twice recorded in the fiants for the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century as an alias for ‘Carrigbegge’ and ‘Corrybegge’, which is identifiable on the first edition Ordnance Survey six-inch map as Carrickbeg townland. The modern townland is very small, at just over 44 acres. By comparing it with the depiction of Carrickbeg on the Down Survey parish map of the mid-seventeenth century (Fig. 1), it is possible to say that the original Carrickbeg, alias Ballymackegan, was larger and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placename</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Lordship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballybrody</td>
<td>Mac Bruidnaide</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>West Clann Chuiléin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballydoogan</td>
<td>Ó Dubhlagáin</td>
<td>Senchas</td>
<td>Uí Mháine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballygown</td>
<td>Mac an Ghabhann</td>
<td>Senchas</td>
<td>Urshumhna fochtarach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballyhickey</td>
<td>Ó hileadhla</td>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>West Clann Chuiléin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballyhose</td>
<td>Ó hEodhása</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>Fhe Mhannach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballymacaward</td>
<td>Mac an Bhaireid</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>Tír Conaill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballymackegan</td>
<td>Mac Aodhagáin</td>
<td>Law</td>
<td>Southern Anghaile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballyronney</td>
<td>Ó Ruanadhá</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>Uí Eichneag Cogha</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

monastic schools. Among the
of migrant branches of learned
seventeenth century, are T.F.
nd judges in English documents,
1 acquisition by Gaelic bardic
r sources”; and L. McInerney’s
in 1586”.
’s, but the land denominations
name—quarters or ballybetghs—
the name-associated townland.
names of these learned family
are on original denominations
landholding of the Meic
ghail Buidhe of Pallas, in law, in
agford) lordship of Ó Fearthail
name became extinct.
ants for the late sixteenth and
Carrigbegge” and “Corrybegge”,
dance Survey six-inch map as
and is very small, at just over 44
n of Carrickbeg on the Down
century (Fig. 1), it is possible to
Ballymackeggan, was larger and
cluded portions of the later surrounding townlands of Keel, Cartron
and Rathmore. Topography also tends to corroborate a view of this learned
family landholding as larger than its modern correlative and reveals that its
southern end may have been given to a particular use. The northern
portion of the townland of Keel, which once lay within Ballymackeggan,
contains two deer parks associated with the nearby King-Harmann estate.15

There is a pattern of association between learned family lands and deer
parks on later demesnes. This is because the holdings of secular learned
families who served the courts of Gaelic lords were situated on the lucht
tighe or mensal lands of the lordships. The lucht tighe incorporated service
family lands, hunting grounds, mineral deposits and, often, an assembly
place. Hunting grounds and livestock ranges on Gaelic mensal lands tended
to be emparcked in the early modern period. The later deer parks in Keel
occur in open, undulating, rocky pasture, which is indicated as a tree-
covered landscape on the Down Survey parish map. The place-names of
the townlands of Crecagh Beg (An Chraobhach Bheag) and Crecagh
More (An Chraobhach Mhór) that adjoin Carrickbeg (see Fig. 1), indicate a
busky or branchy landscape which would have been an appropriate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Lordship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>shtry</td>
<td>West Clann Chuilén</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mhach</td>
<td>Ui Mhaíne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mhach</td>
<td>Urmhumha Íochtarach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>edcine</td>
<td>West Clann Chuilén</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shtry</td>
<td>Tir Mhanach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shtry</td>
<td>Tír Conall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shtry</td>
<td>Southern Anghaile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shtry</td>
<td>Ui Eachach Cobha</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15 King-Harmann estates. Rent book of the Newcastle estate, Co. Longford, between 1782
and 1846 Dublin: Public Record Office (PRO), M. 1259–1278. The King-Harmann family
owned the largest estate in Co. Longford in the nineteenth century, with its seat at Newcastle
House, near Ballymahan in that county.
environment for deer but also for other livestock such as horses. That there were significant herds of livestock in the vicinity is suggested by a chronicle reference for the year 1468 to a ‘Crech mor... forin Cratbech hi cosit Eithne’, a plundering expedition conducted by Ó Conchobhair Failge on Creevagh, by the River Inny, during which some forty of their packhorses [da n-echaib imachair] were taken.\(^6\)

The keeping of horses was significant in the Gaelic lordships of Ireland, to the extent that Nicholls has suggested that ‘late Gaelic Ireland was probably an equestrian society to a much greater extent than has been generally realised’.\(^7\) Horses were kept for a variety of reasons that included breeding, transport, ploughing (with ‘garrans’ or working-horses) and racing. As Kelly has noted, two main types of horse are distinguished in early medieval sources—the capall fognamo and the ech immrinne.\(^8\) The capall was a work-horse, probably synonymous with the garran which was used, among other labours, for ploughing, while the ech was a riding-horse or steed. Bardic poetry reveals gift-giving of riding horses to poets in exchange for their services.\(^9\) In a poem for Domhnall Óg Ó Domhnaill (d. 1281) by Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe, the poet acknowledges that Domhnall ‘gave a horse for services’ to him.\(^10\) A eulogy for the Mág Shamhradháin chief of Teolphach nEachach exclaims that he ‘keeps all poets alive – such hospitality! Few Gaoidhil are freer in giving horses, he refuses nothing to any man.’\(^11\)

Horse-related place-names are documented on the first edition Ordnance Survey six-inch maps in and adjacent to former landholdings of learned families. Some of these are designated as ‘horse park’ and ‘race course’ on modern demesnes that incorporated earlier learned family holdings. On the former lands of a branch of the Úi Chobhthaigh poets at Ballinkeeney,\(^2\) which became Mosstown House demesne, southwest of the village of Killare in Westmeath, the emparked landscape includes areas designated as ‘horse park and ‘race park’. East of the Meic an Ghabhann lands at Béal Átha Ghabhann (Ballygown) in Silvermines, ‘race park’ is noted by the first Ordnance Survey in the townland of Cooleen, which is adjoined on its east side by Deer Park townland. Racing activity in medieval Ireland is generally found in association with an Óenach or tribal assembly place. The occurrence of the place-name ‘race course’ or ‘race park’ in conjunction with an attested early medieval assembly site may also indicate a much earlier layer of the territorial palimpsest on learned family holdings. This is intimated, for instance, in a range of place-names in the landscape of the Lagan of Leinster, which was the core patrimonial land of

---

\(^6\) A Conn 1468:38.

\(^7\) K.W. Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicized Ireland in the middle ages* (Dublin, 2003), 138.

\(^8\) F. Kelly, *Early Irish farming* (Dublin, 2000), 89–90.

\(^9\) I am grateful to Katharine Simms for pointing this out.


\(^11\) L. McKenna (ed.), *The Book of Magnusun: Leabhar Méig Shamhradháin* (Dublin, 1947), 59 [VII: 7].

such as horses. That there is suggested by a chronicle in *Craitech hi cois Ethne*, Conchobhair Faighe on forty of their packhorses.

Alic lordships of Ireland, 'late Gaelic Ireland was not extensive than has been ty of reasons that included working-horses) and racing. are distinguished in early *h inmrëinne*. The *capall* *garran* which was used, *eoch* was a riding-horse or orses to poets in exchange Ó Domhnail (d. 1281) by edges that Domhnall 'gave fág Shamhradháin chief of its alive - such hospitality! as nothing to any man'.

On the first edition Ord- o former landholdings of as 'horse park' and 'race ed earlier learned family > Úi Chobthairg poets at desmesne, southwest of the landscape includes areas of the Meic an Ghabhann Silvermines, 'race park' is land of Cooleen, which is land. Racing activity in with an *óenach* or tribal *ame 'race course' or *race* assembly site may also limpses on learned family rge of place-names in the 1e core patrimonial land of the Uí Cheinnsealáig on the Wexford–Wicklow border. The site of the inauguration place of the Uí Cheinnsealáig is Loggan Lower townland, southwest of which is Pallis where the Meic Eochadha poets were located.

They were the hereditary inaugurators of the Uí Cheinnsealáig and their role is encapsulated in the assembly site name, Leac Mhic Eochadha, as recorded by Keating. West of Pallis and southwest of Loggan Lower there is a group of townlands around Bickstown House demesne that are named: Knocknagapple, Racecourse, Deerpark. These, together with the assembly site, the *palls* celebrated in the townlands of that name and the presence of the landholding of the poet-inaugurator, point to this being the location of the dynastic centre of the Uí Cheinnsealáig.

Just as a sept name was incorporated into the place-name of a learned family landholding, the profession ascribed to a family was also sometimes used in conjunction with a land denomination term. *Ceart Úi Néill*, which was compiled in the late fifteenth or sixteenth century but obviously refers to earlier rather than to contemporary circumstances, cites Fearann an Reacaire, 'the Reciter's land', as the holding of the Mac Con Midhe *ollamh* in poetry to the Úi Néill of Tir Eoghain—'On the night that he is in Ard Sratha his table is supplied by Mac Conmidhe from Loch I Mhaoldubhán, the Reciter's land'—in *Slocht Airt Úi Néill*. The respective representatives of the Mac Con Midhe in poetry regarded this land, central to which was Loch I Mhaoldubhán, as integral to their hereditary office, but it was forfeited in 1435 because the *ollamh* offended Ó Néill.

During the sixteenth century the term 'rhymer' was commonly used of poets by Tudor administrators and, unlike 'reciter', it was a pejorative term in that context. Sir William Herbert, having left Ireland in 1590, singled out the poets in his writings about the state of Ireland as a particular menace to good order in society:

...the repression of those evil triflers whom they call "poets" or "rhymer" and who excite the unstable minds of fierce men to rebellion and crime would be most useful for Ireland. And on that account the wisest and soundest laws have been passed to stifle and banish these Sirens.

'Rhymer' is also occasionally seen on Tudor maps, where cartographers used it to designate the landholdings of particular poetic families. When the

---

23 O'Rahilly, 'Irish poets, historians and Judges', 91.
lands of the Uí Dhálalaigh poets of Muinter Bháire, which is synonymous
with Sheepshead peninsula and Kilkrohane medieval parish in West
Carbery, Co. Cork, were mapped by Francis Jobson as part of a map of
the province of Munster commissioned by Lord Burleigh in 1589, he
referred to the entire peninsula as ‘Rymers’, thereby identifying it as the
land of the Uí Dhálalaigh.28 The circumstance in which the Uí Dhálalaigh came
to settle on the Sheepshead peninsula, from the patrimonial lands of their
sept in the midland kingdom of Teathbha, is not entirely clear, but it has
been convincingly argued by O’Sullivan that it was probably the Anglo-
Norman Carew family, sometime allies of the Meic Carthaigh,29 who settled
the Uí Dhálalaigh onto the Muinter Bháire lands of the Sheepshead
peninsula during the late twelfth century.30 This claim was made c. 1618
by Tadhg Ó Dálaigh, ollamh and head of the senior Uí Dhálalaigh line of
Muinter Bháire, in his poem Gabh mo ghearr an a Sheóirse (‘Heed, O
George, my complaint’), addressed to Sir George Carew. Tadhg wrote:

*Rinn cheana do chinne fhíne
mar fuair cenn ar geirtí-ne;
deantair lai uaise oram
gla c an uair-se a uraghall.*

‘The head of our poetic family once got apromontory from the head
of your family; deal generously, as I advise, receive now my complaint
about it’.31

By all measures 36 ploughlands, 3 ploughlands of which were church land,32
was a sizeable land allocation to a learned family who were relative
newcomers to Munster, but the quality of the land on Sheepshead
peninsula must be taken into account. It is predominantly marginal upland,
with most settlement forced onto the southern strip of coastline over-
looking Dunmanus Bay.

Mac Cana in his influential paper on ‘The rise of the later schools of
filidheacht’ clarified why some of the later schools came to be where they
are, based on an earlier suggestion by Flower.33 The class of later hereditary
literary families arose from the hereditary ecclesiastical families who main-
tained possession of monastic termonland as comharbaí and airchinnigh
long after the monastic schools had broken up. In other words, many of
the later medieval learned families were synonymous with hereditary

28 TCD MS 1209, no. 36.
30 Lambeth Palace MS. 605, fol. 239; O’Sullivan, ‘Tadhg O’Daly’, 27, 34, 37; J. O’Donovan,
The tribes of Ireland: a satire by Aenghus O’Daly (Dublin, 1852), 4, 10.
31 J.S. Brewer and W. Bullen (eds), Calendar of the Carew Papers 1589–1600 (London,
1860), 352.
EARNED FAMILIES

háire, which is synonymous with medieval parish in West Jobson as part of a map of Lord Burleigh in 1589, he thereby identifying it as the which the Ui Dhálaigh came to their patrimonial lands of their not entirely clear, but it has it was probably the Anglo-Meic Carthaigh,29 who settled the lands of the Sheephead. This claim was made c. 1618 by senior Ui Dhálaigh line of terán a Sheóirse (‘Heed, O orge Carew. Tadhg wrote:

a promontory from the head and, receive now my complaint

s of which were church land,30 the family who were relative of the church on Sheephead edominantly marginal upland, herein strip of coastline over

the rise of the later schools of chool came to be where they were. The class of later hereditary 
esclesiastical families who main comharbait and airchinnigh up. In other words, many of the synonymous with hereditary


see Carew Papers 1889–1600 (London, weacht’, Ériu 25 (1974), 126–46: 127–30; ecclesiastical families who paid dues to the bishops, maintained church fabric, served the cure of souls, farmed and kept houses of hospitality. Many learned families are therefore found on church land. Typical of this relationship is the example of the Ó Dubhghaigín comharba of Cill Rónain who was ollamh in sencas to Mac Diarmada of Magh Luirg. Cill Rónain is situated on the northern shore of Loch Mór Máothla (Lough Meelagh) north of Boyle in Co. Roscommon (Fig. 2). Several branches of the Ó Dubhghaigín are found in north Connacht practising sencas in the later medieval period and, as Simms has observed, they are typical of the schools of sencas that were established during the fourteenth century as a result of a ‘revival of the study of traditional Irish historical lore and genealogies, which involved transcribing Old Irish saga texts, historical tracts, and genealogies from twelfth-century manuscripts of the pre-reform church schools’.34 But the ollamh in sencas to Clann Mhaol Ruanaidh at the Cill Rónain school, like so many of the representatives of learned families, was a multi-faceted and robust official who incorporated many roles. Late-fourteenth-century chronicle entries refer to David Ó Dubhghaigín an as, at once, an ollamh, a biachadh, a guest-house keeper and comharba of St Lasair;35 and Dolbh Ó Dubhghaigín

![Fig. 2.—The cultural landscape of Loch Mór Máothla showing the lands of the Ó Dubhghaigín comharba of Cill Rónain and ollamh in sencas to the Mac Diarmada of Magh Luirg. (Drawing by Rory Sherlock based on Ordnance Survey 6-inch map, sheet 4, Co. Roscommon.)](https://example.com/fig2.jpg)

who died in 1578 is described as ‘a learned historian, who kept a thronged house of general hospitality’.

Lasair, the saint to whom Ó Dubhghaillín was comharba, was allegedly the daughter of Rónán, who gives his name to the medieval parish and church of Cill Rónán. The cult of St Lasair was maintained by the comharba and a Life of Lasair was compiled by David Ó Dubhghaillín in 1670. Indications of the more pragmatic role of the Ó Dubhghaillín ollamh and comharba, as a biatach, are found on the landscape and in the chronicles. An entry noting the death in very old age of the ollamh in his own house at Cill Rónán in 1488 refers to him as ‘the richest of the literati of Ireland in flocks and herds’. The Cill Rónán landscape is a mix of dry and wet meadow, upland, woodland and lake—a perfect combination of resources to support livestock (see Fig. 2). The keeping of one form of livestock or other was not exclusive, because various kinds of livestock could be grazed together. Above the church there is a level area where the wall-footings of two stone buildings lie, and north of these the land falls away before climbing again to Kllronan Mountain. In this area between the house platforms and the foot of the mountain there is a large tract of lush, wet grassland, which is divided into a series of long fields by the remains of relict field walls constructed of very large boulders. Two townland names west of this level tract of land are Stonepark and Catron na gCloch (Ceathrúinbain na gCloch), signifying rocky pasture. Noteworthy too is the townland named Curraghnabole that adjoins Stonepark further upland and indicates a booley site, either for milking or for seasonal movement of livestock. A small area of pre-modern ridge and furrow is also visible on the landscape at the northern end of Church Acres townland on the hill-slope crowned by Carraig Aodháin and northwest of the relict field boundaries (Fig. 2).

Service families to the households of Gaelic lords were situated on the mensal lands of the lordships. The following extract from Sir John Davies’s tract on the ‘Lawes of Irelande’ (1609) explains that the lucht tighe or mensal lands of a lordship were inhabited by these providers, among whom were the particular branches of the secular learned families that served the Gaelic court:

The chief had certain lands in demesne which were called his loughty [lucht tighe], or mensal lands wherein he placed his principal officers, namely his Brehon, his marshal, his cupbearer, his Physician, his surgeon, his Chronicler, his Rhymer, and others, which offices and possessions were hereditary and peculiar to certain septs and families. . .

36 AFM 1578.
38 AFM 1488.
istorian, who kept a thronged to whom Ó Duibhgeannáin Rónáin, who gives his name to án. The cult of St Lasair was sair was compiled by David Ó more pragmatic role of the Ó a biatach, are found on the sting the death in very old age in 1488 refers to him as ‘the ind herds’.

The Cill Rónáin upland, woodland and lake—a rt livestock (see Fig. 2). The er was not exclusive, because I together. Above the church of two stone buildings lie, and e climbing again to Kilronan platforms and the foot of the cassland, which is divided into a field walls constructed of very of this level tract of land are ramhain na gCloch), signifying nd named Curraghnaboley that icates a booley site, either for cK. A small area of pre-modern scape at the northern end of owned by Carraig Aodháin and ig, 2).

e lords were situated on the g extract from Sir John Davies’s ins that the lucht tighe or mensal providers, among whom were the families that served the Gaelic se which were called his loughty le placed his principal officers, is cupbearer, his Physician, his s, and others, which offices and peculiar to certain septs and

In return for his professional services, an ollamh of a learned family on mensal land was immune from paying cios or tribute, which was generally an annual payment, but as an inhabitant of the lucht tighe he was obliged to provide food and other resources for the chief’s household. This obligation to resource the household on a regular basis predicates significant land-based activity on learned family mensal landholdings. While much of that activity appears to have been focused on tillage (especially oats) and livestock rearing, particularly cattle, sheep and pigs, there is evidence that deer were present too and that horses were kept for ploughing and for riding. A record taken in 1608 of the property of Tadhg Ó Cíanáin, chronicler to the Méig Uidhir of Fir Mhanach, observed that he had owned, and by then had forfeited, 15 cows, 8 calves, 1 garran (workhorse), 1 hackney (riding-horse) and 25 swine. In the circumstances of the Nine Years’ War and its aftermath, this record may reflect Ó Cíanáin’s livestock at a considerably reduced level.

Landholdings of learned families in the lucht tighe are sometimes revealed in inquisitions. An inquisition of the Court of Exchequer (1585) concerning the lordship of West Clann Chuiléin in south Co. Clare, records that the holding of the Ó hÍdeadhna physicans at Ballyhickey consisted of one-and-a-half quarters of mensal land. The following reading of the lands of the Ó hÍdeadhna ollamh in medicine captures various elements of his local world. The physician to a chief resided, for obvious reasons, close to the chiefry castle and usually within the lucht tighe, a juxtaposition which is seen, for instance, in the location of the lands of the Ó hÍdeadhna physicians to Daingean Ui Bhigín castle, the principal seat of the Mac Connara Finn of the lordship of West Clann Chuiléin. Ó hÍdeadhna was also hereditary physician to the Ó Briain overlord of Thomond. The name of their holding survives in the townland of Ballyhickey, which is 385 acres of mostly rough rocky pasture and upland west of the village of Quin, in the parish of Clooney, Co. Clare. The townland of Drim which adjoins it on its west side was also part of the former Ballyhickey denomination and is characterised by 217 acres of rocky pasture with a turlough or seasonal lake in the south of the townland. Ballyhickey is adjoined on its northwest side by Moyriesk, which, as a later demesne landscape, contained a deer park that abuts the townlands of Drim and Ballyhickey and which is noted on the first edition Ordnance Survey map (1842).

Although the deer park place-name is clearly associated with the nineteenth-century Moyriesk House of the Vesey Fitzgerald family,

---

5 (1911), 73–109.

1. ‘The Lawes of Irelande: a tract by Sir

40 Simms, From kings to warlords, 143–5, 172.
41 C.W. Russell and J.P. Prendergast (eds), Calendar of the State Papers relating to Ireland of the reign of James I, 1608–10 (London, 1874), 537, 543.
43 J. Hickey, The O’Hickeys: hereditary physicians to the Ó Brians of Thomond and some of their descendants, North Munster Antiquarian Journal 8 (1958), 38–41.
44 Prior to that the Moyriesk lands had been Macnamara property from the late seventeenth century.
is a correspondence between later demesne deer parks and learned family lands, as already observed in relation to Mac Aodhagáin of Ballymackeghan. Typically, deer require a varied environment, including open grassland, wood or tracts of wild, semi-wooded country, and consistent and accessible watering places. The undulating topography of rocky pasture, combined with a permanent pond, a seasonal lake and areas of blackthorns, young wood and scrub land at Ballyhickey would have been ideal conditions for deer and for grazing other livestock. Of course, the keeping of one form of livestock or other would not have been exclusive; as already stated, various kinds of livestock could be grazed together. The keeping of livestock was clearly an important activity on learned family holdings. Apart from the foods obtained from these animals, it must be considered that the scribal activities of learned family schools created a demand for a regular supply of parchment, which would have been obtained from the membrane of cattle (not necessarily vellum or calf-skin), sheep, goat and possibly even from deer. On such parchment, medical texts, poetry and the genealogies, histories, law and lore of Gaelic civilisation were copied down by the schools.

Park townland names and park field and monument names, as recorded by the first Ordnance Survey of the nineteenth century, are very common on, and in the vicinity of, former learned family landholdings. For instance, there is Parke townland on the Mac Fhirbhisigh landholding at Lackan in Tír Fiachrach; ‘Park fort’ in Creevy townland between the lands of the Mac an Bhaird poets and Ó Cléirigh historians in Tír Conaill; and ‘Parkmore Fort’ at Finavarra where the Ó Dálaigh poets in the lordship of Boireann kept a guest-house and school. That the term pàirc had meaning in a Gaelic context before the intensive emparkment that occurred with English-style demesnes in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, is confirmed by its use in native sources. Between 1565 and 1570 Domhnall Ó Duibh Ò Bhóireann and his Burren school were frequently based in the Mac Aodhagáin school at Páirc in the McDaid-Burke lordship of Clann Conmaigh, in order to copy material for Domhnall’s legal glossary (British Library, London Ms Egerton 88, Royal Library, Copenhagen Ms NKS 261 b 4°, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin Ms 23 O 6; pp 33–52).45 In that manuscript several of the scribes note their location as ‘in the Park’:

Mei est incipere Dei est infinitum i. do Domnall ó Dhaibh dhá boireann in aidchí iar fèil Br[gh]de 1569, ar in pàirc adh.

‘Mine it is to begin and God’s to finish. [written] for Donall O’Davoren the night following S. Bridget’s Festival 1569. I am at Park.’46

deer parks and learned family Aodhagáin of Ballymackegan, dedging open grassland, wood areas and grassy areas of rocky pasture, combined with blackthorns. The keeping of one form of livestock was nitty and, as already stated, various.

The keeping of livestock was nitty holdings. Apart from the be considered, the scribal demand for a regular supply of cattle, goat and possibly even from y and the genealogies, histories ed down by the schools,

monument names, as recorded in the century, are very common on
and holdings. For instance, there
landholding at Lackan in Tir e d'Chinnéidigh of Urmhunna Óachtarach, is centred on the silver mines that give their name to the later century of Silvermines, Co. Tipperary, and that the landholding of the Clare branch of that sept, at Coskeen in the lordship of Boireann, is

omnall ó Dubh dhá boireann in lirc ait.

[written] for Donall O'Davoren l 1569. I am at Park.47

49 O'Rahilly, 'Irish poets, historians and judges', 93–4.
50 Simms, 'Bardic schools', 37.

Still more interesting is the repeated use of deer imagery, sketched in ink in a naïve style within the bottom margins of some framed folios of the manuscript, which, O'Sullivan suggests, were variously executed in 1565, 1566 and 1567.47 The stags, hinds and hunting dogs featured may reflect the real presence of deer and hunting grounds on the pasture and bogland that constituted most of the Mac Aodhagáin landholding at Páirc.

Aside from livestock, the availability of mineral deposits on learned family holdings and the extent, if any, to which they might have engaged as craftsmen with those resources, is a consideration that requires greater field research. On the western side of Ballyliskey townland, close to the boundary with Moyreis, a silver and lead mine operated in the nineteenth century and Kilbreckan silver mine is situated in Monanoe, close to the boundary with Drim townland. Whether the silver deposits in this area were exploited during the later medieval period by the Uí Íceadha is as yet unknown, but it is worth recalling that the landholding of Mac an Ghabhann, who was traditional historian to the Uí Chinnéidigh of Urmhunna Óochtaraich, is centred on the silver mines that give their name to the later century of Silvermines, Co. Tipperary, and that the landholding of the Clare branch of that sept, at Coskeen in the lordship of Boireann, is

killed to the west by Ailwee Mountain where deposits of lead and silver were mined in the nineteenth century. On the Muinter Bháire lands of the Uí Dhálaigh there are deposits of copper in Gortavallig and silver in Killoveenoge, appropriately overlooked by 'Seefin' (Suidhe Fheinn; Fig. 3), the highest point of the Sheephead peninsula. 'Knockseefin' in Lackanascarry townland overlooks Pallas Grean village and Pallashill—an area of significant zinc-lead mineralisation49 in Co. Limerick—where a branch of the Mág Craith poets of Garrison resided in the sixteenth century.50

Such relationships between learned family lands and mineral enrichment may reflect the earlier situation of ceard (craftsmen) on royal demesne lands. Although the term gabha in the name Mac an Ghabhann means blacksmith and strictly speaking relates to iron-working, metal-working in silver is a craft and therefore pertains to the ollamh ceard. Members of medical family schools often stepped outside of their profession to act as scribes in the compilation of material from history, law and poetry in other schools.51 The extension of that dexterity to include silver-smithing, in the case of the Uí Íceadha or a member of their household on the lucht tighe lands of West Clann Chuiléin, is not implausible, but if an association between learned families and high-quality metallurgy can be made, that connection in the case of the Uí Íceadha may be historical rather than actual by the late medieval period and may refer to the exploitation of mineral
resources for fine metalwork on the early medieval Dál gCais royal demesne of Tuath Mhaige Adhair where their later landholding was located. In an early medieval context, Nagy has referred to the portrayal of Finn in myth, and specifically in Tóraigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne, as leech or healer in addition to poet and smith. The learned classes may have cultivated and projected themselves in the Fenian tradition, as polymaths and possessors of ‘the esoteric and supernatural knowledge common to craftsmen’.

**NATURAL AND ANTIQUE LANDSCAPE**

It can be argued that there were factors, other than economic resources, such as natural beauty and wilderness and proximity to antiquities, taken into consideration in the allocation of landholdings to learned families, especially for poets and traditional historians. Simms has noted that the poets had an appreciation of natural beauty and ‘considered an extensive view of the countryside as an aesthetic delight’.\(^3\)\(^2\) It is hardly coincidence that schools of *senchas* and poetry tend to be located in areas of great natural beauty and wilderness. Lying between Bantry Bay and Dunmanus Bay, the setting of the school and residence of the Úi Dháláigh poets at Dromnea and Farranmanagh, on the Sheepshead peninsula in Co. Cork,

\(^{31}\) Nagy, The wisdom of the outlaw, 34–5.

\(^{32}\) Simms, ‘References to landscape and economy’, 146.
e mythical hero Fionn mac Cumhaill, or Bháire, Sheep'shead peninsula, Co.

lieval Dál gCais royal demesne andholding was located. In an
the portrayal of Finn in myth,
3us Ghráinne, as leech or healer
lasses may have cultivated and
1, as polymaths and possessors
common to craftsmen.51

LANDSCAPE

other than economic resources,
proximity to antiquities, taken
aholdings to learned families,
ans. Simms has noted that the
y and ‘considered an extensive
ight’.52 It is hardly coincidence
o be located in areas of great
en Bantry Bay and Dunmanus
ce of the Uí Dhálraigh poets at
pshead peninsula in Co. Cork,

Fig. 4—View over Loch Mór Máothla from the medieval parish church of Gille Rónnain (photo: E. FitzPatrick).

affords an outstanding view to the Beara peninsula. The location of the Uí Dhuihindheannán settlement on a terraced hillside below Kilarney mountain, overlooking Loch Mór Máothla, is nature’s beautiful composition (Fig. 4), while the landscape setting of the Uí Chléirigh landholding at Kilbarron on the edge of the Atlantic overlooking Donegal Bay, with a view northwest to the cliffs of Slieve League, is dramatically liminal (Fig. 5).

The sequestered hillside and coastal settings of these landholdings also convey a sense of exile or retreat from the world, although they were integral to a highly organised and complex lordship territorial matrix. In literary tradition, the poet (fílí) and member of a warrior band (fénnid) are primary in the mythological character of Fionn mac Cumhaill who, as the poet-exile, finds special knowledge in the wilderness.53 Thomas O’Sullivan’s eighteenth-century description of a bardic school in the introduction

Fig. 5—The tower house settlement of the Uí Chléirigh situated on a promontory overlooking the Atlantic, at Kilbarron, Co. Donegal (photo: E. FitzPatrick).

53 Nagy, The wisdom of the outlaw, 17.
to Carte’s Life of the Duke of Ormond, supports a view of the bardic schools as sequestered institutions. McManus has explained that in respect of the educational routine and conditions of a bardic school ‘much of O’Sullevane’s account is supported by the evidence of poetry’. O’Sullevane comments that ‘it was likewise necessary the place should be in the solitary recess of a garden, or within a sept or inclosure, far out of reach of any noise, which an intercourse of people might otherwise occasion.’ His view of the ideal location of a bardic school should be treated with some credibility, not least because the landscape setting of schools of senchas and poetry, in particular, tend to support that opinion.

When a learned family received a parcel of land, it was not a green-field site but generally a place that already carried the marks of settlement, and some of it of considerable antiquity. Prehistoric landscapes and especially megalithic tombs are often found on the landholdings of schools of senchas and poetry. Around Loch Mór Máithlath there are several court tombs and a large tumulus. Within 50m of a rath and just north of the schoolhouse of the Úi Dhaluigh of Dromnea on the Sheephead peninsula there was a monumental stone row, unfortunately cleared during land improvements. Are such occurrences merely coincidental or is it the case that the obsession of the hereditary learned classes with the past was not just confined to the written word but to antiquities in their immediate environments? The juxtaposition of some learned family holdings to the assembly sites of Gaelic lordships can, of course, be explained by the fact that quite often assembly places and service family holdings were situated on the lucht tighe. The landholding of the Ó hÍceadha physician to Ó Briain and to MacConmara Fionn, at Ballyhickey and Drim, was a parcel of antique cultural landscape containing within its bounds two prehistoric megalithic tombs, a standing stone and a stone row, a mound, a large hilltop enclosure and a holy well dedicated to St Seanán. More pertinently, the inauguration mound of Magh Adhair and its complex of monuments, where the Úi Bhriain and their Dál gCais ancestors were inaugurated, lie just east of Ballyhickey. Likewise, the lands of the Mac Eochadha poets and inaugurators of the Úi Cheinnsealaigh at Pallis in Co. Wexford are focused in the area of the assembly site of the sept at Loggan Lower. Demonstrating that this phenomenon is more widespread, Lios na Riogh, the assembly place of the Magennis of Iveyagh, is found on the lands of the Ó Ruanadh poets at Lisnacroppan, just southwest of the auspiciously named Seafin [Suídhe Phinn] in Ballyroney parish, Co. Down.


Memoirs of the Right Honourable the Marquis of Clancarar, Lord Deputy General of Ireland . . . With a digression containing several curious observations concerning the antiquities of Ireland (Dublin, 1744), 107–8.


E. Grogan, The north Munster project, vol. 1: the later prehistoric landscape of south-east Clare. Discovery Programme Monograph No. 6 (Bray, 2005), 79–85.
The access that these families had to expansive cult landscapes on mensal lands suggests that they interacted with them especially where they had a hereditary official role in the inauguration ceremony of successive lords of a dynasty at an assembly site of long standing. Their stewardship of the past appears not to have been confined to reproducing it in books, but to active involvement with antiquities on their lands. Families who practised *senchas* and poetry for the Gaelic court were placed on mensal landholdings that incorporated significant antique landscapes. Those lands originally formed part of early medieval royal demesnes. That learned families were also involved in active remembrance of place-names, and possibly even naming or re-naming topographical features and monuments, is indicated by a colophon in the fifteenth-century manuscript known as the Book of Pottlerath, which was compiled by, among others, scribes of the Mac Aodhagáin and O Cléirigh families, and which forms part of the Saltair of Edmund mac Richard Butler, who was the cousin of the Butler Earl of Ormond. A scribe notes the place of writing and the historical name of that place:

Today is the Saturday after Christmas and we are in Pottlerath after writing all that we found collected in the Psalter of Cashel and much from the Book of Rath an and from the Book of the Prebend (Cong). And all the new writing in this book was written for Edmund son of Richard in the Fort of Oengus mac Nad Froich which is now called Pottlerath... 

RESIDENCES AND SCHOOLS

Since groups of kin-based learned families and their schools constituted networks of knowledge exchange, some of which extended to Gaelic Scotland, especially during the sixteenth century, ideas must have been traded not just about manuscripts, but also about the buildings in which they were produced and housed, and more generally about the infrastructure and physical environment of the often substantial landholdings in which learned families lived, worked and farmed. During the fifteenth century, and certainly by the end of the sixteenth century, those who carried the title of *ollamh* generally resided in tower houses, but not exclusively so, as some remained associated with *crannóg* or *inis* settlements, with the *ráth* and *caiseal*, and with the *palis* that is mostly identifiable as a moated site. This settlement picture is quite nuanced. It is the result of a complex process, both of the continued use and modification of historic settlements (some of which had early medieval royal associations and occur on the core lands of ruling families) and a

---


later prehistoric landscape of south-east (2005), 79–85.


desire for the highly visible tower house in response to status and particular needs.

For the ollamh who was also a guest-house keeper, the tower house was perhaps attractive as a residence because it offered the possibility of more defined and controlled use of space, with the separation of guesting and feasting areas from private chambers. One of the most dramatically appointed tower-house residences of a learned family is situated on a promontory at Kilbarron in southwest Donegal which the Úi Chléirigh inherited from their predecessors, the Úi Scingin, with whom they had intermarried (Fig. 5). The promontory, which is likely to have a pre-tower house origin and was perhaps in part chosen for that reason, is walled and gated, and within it there is a small tower house and at least two additional buildings, one of which is possibly a hall for guesting and feasting. The chronicles are rich in references to the hospitality of the Úi Chléirigh in the late fifteenth and sixteenth century. Tadhg Cam Ó Cléirigh who died in 1492 is described as 'ollamh to Ó Domhnaill in literature, poetry and history, a man who had kept a house of general hospitality for the mighty and needy', and his grandson who died in 1556 is lauded as the keeper of 'a house of hospitality for the learned, the exiled and the literary men of neighbouring territories'. The gated and defensive aspect of tower houses might imply that the precious libraries of these families, many built up over generations of scholarship, were located at the residence of the ollamh. Some libraries were clearly large and significant. The library of the Ó Maoil Chonaire school of senchas was apparently so large that Flann Mac Aodhagáin claimed in 1636 '...numerous the unknown number of ancient and modern books which I saw written and being transcribed'. Libraries in tower houses were probably housed in large chests and in wall presses.

Inis and crannóg settlements are associated with several learned families, especially those who were keepers of the arts of poetry and senchas. Loch Í Mhaoldubháin, which was central to the landholding of the Mac Con Midhe in Sliocht Airt Ó Néill, is the most northerly of a chain of three lakes named Lough Catherine, Lough Fanny and Lough Mary on the demesne of Baronscourt, southeast of Ard Sratha (Ardstraw). It has been suggested that Loch Í Mhaoldubháin is Lough Catherine, the largest of the three lakes. It covers c. 91 acres and is distinguished by a significant lake-island settlement called Island McHugh. It is also thought that Lough Catherine is identifiable as Loch Laoghaire, which is recorded several times in the chronicles and also features in a poem by Giolla Brighde Mac

60 Simms, 'Bardic Schools', 36.
61 APM 1492; AConn 1492.7.
62 APM 1556.
Con Midhe.65 Hogan in his Onomasticon suggested that Loch Laoghaire was Lough Mary, the smallest and most southerly of the Baronscourt lakes, but the lack of any settlement on or near that lake makes that identification unlikely.66 Moreover, the presence of a large oval enclosure, variously called Lis Laoghaire (Lislear) and Dún Laoghaire,67 situated 40m from the northern shoreline of Lough Catherine, seems to corroborate the association of the historically recorded place-name Loch Laoghaire with Lough Catherine. Both Loch Í Mhaoldubháin and Loch Laoghaire appear, then, to be alternative names for Lough Catherine.

Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe’s poem is a lament for Brian Ó Néill, referred to by the poet as ‘Brian Locha Laoghaire’, who died at the battle of Downpatrick in 1260.68 In 1325 Domhnall, the son of Brian Ó Néill, chief of Tir Eoghan, died at Loch Laoghaire.69 These references have been interpreted as evidence that the Íris settlement of Island McHugh functioned ‘from the thirteenth century onwards as an important O’Neill residence and high status estate centre’.70 However, the direct connection made between the Mac Con Midhe ollamh and Loch Í Mhaoldubháin, in Ceart Uí Néill, suggests that Island McHugh was the residence of the ollamh in poetry to the Uí Néill and remained so until Mac Con Midhe was exiled from his lands in 1435. Archaeological excavation and scientific dating methods have revealed a complex settlement history at Island McHugh, with prehistoric occupation, a seventh-century construction date for the initial crannóg palisade, followed by a period of abandonment until the thirteenth century when rebuilding on the crannóg surface occurred.71 In the fifteenth century a tower house was constructed on the site and rebuilt in the sixteenth century.72 Dún Laoghaire, the large oval enclosure situated 40m from the northern shoreline of the lake, was also excavated by Ivens and Simpson and, while no medieval material was recovered from the site, they argued for an association between the enclosure and the crannóg.73 Warner proposed that this prominent earthwork was the seat of the kings of Uí Fhiaichrach Arda Sratha and that Island McHugh was

---

65 Williams, The poems of Giolla Brighde, 151 [XIII:52].
66 E. Hogan, Onomasticon Gaedelica: locorum et tribuum Hiberniae et Scotiae (Dublin 1910), 500.
68 Williams, The poems of Giolla Brighde, 150, 309.
69 AFM 1325.1.
71 O. Davies, Excavations at Island MacHugh (Belfast, 1950); R. Ivens, D. Simpson and D. Brown, ‘Excavations at Island MacHugh 1985: interim report’, Ulster Journal of Archaeology 49 (1986), 99–102. Davies’s excavations were conducted intermittently between 1937 and 1947, and the site was revisited by Ivens, Simpson and Brown 1985–6 in order to resolve issues arising from Davies’s excavations.
72 Ivens, Simpson and Brown, ‘Excavations at Island MacHugh’, 100.
perhaps their ‘bolt-hole’. The main point here is that the thirteenth-century occupation of the island settlement may be tied in with the emergence of the Meic Con Midhe as poets to the Úi Néill of Tír Eoghair, and that they may have continued to live there during the fourteenth and into the fifteenth century.

This finds some parallels in the association of other learned families with inis settlements. Cró-inis, or Cormorant Island on Lough Ennell, was the residence of the Ó Cobhthaigh poets in the midland territory of Machaire Úi Thighearnáin. In 1446 the Ó Cobhthaigh ollammh and his two sons were murdered on the tiny island which accommodated their small tower house—

Donnall Ó Cobthaigh and his two sons were treacherously killed by Maelseachlainn son of the son of Art Ó Mailseachlainn and by Feidlim son of the son of Fiacha Mag Eochacain on Crowinis in Loch Ennell, in his own house. He was a man of wide accomplishment and his house was an open guest-house.

The tower house was revealed during excavations by R.A.S. Macalister who misinterpreted the structure as a modern folly. No finds were recorded from that excavation. A more recent investigation of the island, also involving a small-scale dating programme, identified several routes running between the tower house and the lake shore and obtained ninth- and twelfth-century dates for the palisade of the crannóg. Just as the primary medieval occupation of Loch Laoghairc/Loch Í Mhaoldubhán, and very likely its onshore Dún Laoghairc, have royal associations, Cró-inis and the large onshore ráth called Dún na Sciath which lies directly north of the island in the townland of Dysart on the western shore of Lough Ennell, constituted a royal site of the Úi Néill high kings in the tenth and eleventh century. The death of the high king Maelseachnaill on Cró-inis is recorded for AD 1022—Maelseachlaínn Mor, son of Domhnall, son of Donnchadh, pillar of the dignity and nobility of the west of the world, died on Cro-inis Loch-Aainn, after having been forty-three years in sovereignty over Ireland. The Annals of Clonmacnoise provide the important detail that he died ‘in Croinin upon Logh Innill neere his house of Doone Sgiath’, Warner has also commented on this pairing of sites and surmised that the

---

75 AConn 1446.2.
78 AFM 1022.2.
79 AClon 1022.
nt here is that the thirteenth-

nt may be tied in with the
s to the Úi Néill of Tír Eoghain, there during the fourteenth and
on of other learned families with
land on Lough Ennelli, was the
midland territory of Machaire Úi
ollamh and his two sons were
ated their small tower house—
as were treacherously killed by
O Maileachlainn and by Feidlim
ain on Crowinis in Loch Ennell, e accomplishment and his house

cavations by R.A.S. Macalister
modern folly.30 No finds were
cent investigation of the island,
me, identified several routes
ake shore and obtained ninth-
e of the crannóg.77 Just as the
oghaire/Loch Í Mhaolduibháin,
have royal associations, Cró-inis
iath which lies directly north of
western shore of Lough Ennelli,
kings in the tenth and eleventh
achnaill on Cró-inis is recorded
Domhnall, son of Donnchadh, st of the world, died on Cro-inis
ree years in sovereignty over
vise the important detail that
re house of Doone Sgiath',79

of sites and surmised that the

m of Archaeology 57 (1994), 61-9: 68.
iation of the potential of offshore and
'extreme Ireland', International Journal
ly, 'Observations on Irish lakes'. in C. art and archaeology, American Early

island on which Máelseachnaill died 'seems to have been some sort of
adjunct, perhaps a secondary dwelling, a personal retreat'.81
Both of the islands discussed here suggest a pattern of poetic families
residing, from the high medieval period, on the crannóg settlements
associated with onshore early medieval royal sites, but the fact that in
the early medieval period these islands were places where sick kings
were tended or went to die, also suggests that their original role might be
more clearly defined than 'bolt-holes' or 'personal retreats'. They could
have been bruidhe (hostels) to the respective onshore royal residences,
and in particular they may have been monastic hostels run by churchmen
who held the hereditary offices of comharba and airchomnaech. Cró-inis is,
after all, in the large townland of Dysart which, as the place-name suggests,
is distinguished by a monastic site. That obligations of the monastic hostel
included compassionate caring for the weary and sick traveller is
communicated in Columba's instruction as to how to extend hospitality
to an exhausted crane:

'You will... lift it tenderly, and carry it to the house near by; and having
taken it in as a guest there, you will wait upon it for three days and
three nights, and feed it with anxious care'.81

The role of the brughaidh, fear tighe aoidheadh, biatch or hospitalier
and the keeping of a teach n-aoidheadh or guest-house is, of course, one
that is common to the representatives of several learned families, and
especially those who were also hereditary churchmen. The 1446 chronicle
entry relating to the death of the Ó Cobhthaigh ollamh in poetry in his
own house on Cró-inis adds that 'he was a man of wide accomplishment
and his house was an open guest-house'. This role also distinguished the
Ó Dubhgeannan comharba of Cill Rónán. Paralleling the relationship
between Cró-inis as an early medieval island hospice or possibly a bruiden,
and its later life as a learned family residence, an island variously called Inis
na Naomh and Inis Mór Máothla (see Fig. 2 above), located close to the
eastern shore of Loch Mór Máothla, features poignantly in the Life of St
Lasair as the place to which Lasair takes her sick father Rónán to die.82
This island is likely to have been the Ó Dubhgeannanáin residence or
guest-house from the fourteenth century. Some of the timbers of the
crannóg platform remain in place.

In the Burren uplands of the Ó Lochlainn lordship, the Ó Dubh dá
Bhóireann ollamh's residence, was a caiséal (Fig. 6) situated on his
landholding of Cathair Mhíc Neachtain, at least until the late sixteenth
century when the Composition of Connacht (1585) records the ollamh,

81 Warner, 'On crannogs and kings', 63.
82 A. and M.O. Andersen (eds and trans), Adomnán's Life of Columba (Oxford, 1961),
87 i. 48.
83 Gwynn, 'Life of St Lasair', 97, 99.
Giolla na Naomh, living in the small tower house of Lissylsheen directly south of Cahermacnaghten townland. By 1601 the caiseal was the property of Aodh, the son of the ollamh, and by 1606 both Aodh and his brother Cosnamhach were sharing it, which was typical of the partible inheritance that characterised early modern Gaelic land holding. Although early medieval in origin, the caiseal was fashionably refurbished with a gate-house sometime in the late medieval period, and by 1606 the garth contained five buildings which are probably contemporary with the gate-house. The caiseal is generally regarded as the site of the Ó Dubhghá Bhoireann law school, but a building called Cabhail Tighe Breac in the southwest end of their landholding appears to have been a schoolhouse where pupils learned their arts. Archaeological survey and excavation have shown that Cabhail Tighe Breac is a single-storey building with the generous proportions of a medieval hall or church, initially partitioned at the west end and with a loft above. The gables contain four large keeping holes or wall presses which would be expected in a schoolhouse. The building was entered at the east end of the north wall through a moulded doorway more typical of a church and lit by seven windows of Tudor late gothic form, shuttered and not glazed. Dating evidence suggests that the building was first built and used c. 1500. Apart from fragments of window

82 A.M. Freeman (ed.), 1936 The composition booke of Conought of 1585 (Dublin 1936), 7.
87 The principal aim of the excavations conducted in the southwest end of Cahermacnaghten townland in 2007, 2008 and 2010 was to test the hypothesis that Cabhail Tighe Breac was the late medieval spinelagh or schoolhouse. A total of four licences to excavate were held between 2007 and 2010 (07E0395, 08E35, 10E146 and 10E147).
and door forms which were essential to reconstructing a view of the
building, the only small artefacts recovered from the primary period of use
are a minute fragment of slate bearing a single inscribed character, and two
iron objects — the top of a knife and possibly a pricker or a fork. While one
piece of slate does not make a school, the architecture of the structure itself
is important. It does not fall into any category of Irish rural domestic
dwelling of c.1500 but has the character of a hall or church. The sequenced
location of the building also suggests that it had a special purpose which
required solitude and concealment.

Simms has noted that for the fourteenth century ‘we have evidence for
fixed schools, each located at the home of a chief poet, using books in their
studies’,88 but by the beginning of the sixteenth century, at least, the
concept of a sgoilteagh/teach na scoile,89 a schoolhouse devoted to the
scribal and learning activity of Gaelic professional schools, had emerged,
perhaps in response to a need for more specialisation of space and the
separation of the business of learning and writing from the guesthouse,
residence and library of the ollamh. Research to date suggests that it was a
private institutional space in the style of a medieval hall or church, or a
church combining use as a school, set apart from the learned family
residence.

Moated sites are generally attributed to Anglo-Norman settlement, but
the moated site in a Gaelic context is distinguished by the word pailis,
which is variously translated as a stockade or fortified enclosure and more
poetically as a palace.90 In bardic poetry the pailis as the setting for a
significant timber house, has royal associations, the most renowned pailis
being that of the O Conchobhair ‘king of Connacht’ at Cluain Fraoch in
Machaire Connacht, celebrated in a fourteenth-century poem by Aonghus
Ó Dálaigh.91 Kieran O’Conor has shown, through detailed fieldwork,
that moated sites in Roscommon have Gaelic origins and use.92 However,
the pailis has a greater distribution, reflected in townland names that
incorporate the term, and it is frequently associated with learned families.


89 Writing from the Mac Aodhaighín school at Park in the sixteenth century, one of
Domhnall Ó Dubháil le Bhóreann’s scribes, while working on Domhnall’s legal glossary,
scribbled this marginal comment—Is mar aic Gerald do Íor laderin don gspoilteag uchadh.
‘Gerald keeps on coming too often to the schoolhouse in quest of certain girls of mine’
(laderin read as an acronym for der liam); O’Grady, Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts, 120.
Risteard Ó Conchubhair while transcribing a copy of Liber pronosticorum recorded his place
and circumstances of writing as — “...a bhifocair mo magais agus mo bhruadar a teach na spiolí a
naChadh Mhic Airt in b. Na do Mharta agus dar mo oibrigh sam oibhrigh iarainn, 1590”, “...in the
company of my master and kinsman [Domnadh Mhic Ó Conchubhair] in the schoolhouse in
Aghmacart in the 6th day of March. And upon my word, I am thirsty and hungry, 1590”, Nich

90 DIL, s.v. pailis.
91 E.C. Quiggin (ed. and trans.), ‘Ó Conchúrs house at Cloonfree’, in E.C. Quiggin (ed.),
Essays and studies presented to William Ridgeway (Cambridge, 1913), 333–52.
92 K. O’Conor, ‘The morphology of Gaelic lordly sites in north Connacht’, in P.J. Duffy, D.
Edwards and E. FitzPatrick (eds), Gaelic Ireland, c. 1250–c. 1650: land, lordship and settlement
(Dublin, 2001), 329–45.
Fig. 7—A large moated site with a possible *pailís* or hall-type building on the platform and a D-shaped annexe outside the defenses at southwest, situated on the Mac Fhirbishigh landholding at Lackan in Tir Fhiachrach, Co. Sligo (plan: Paul Naessens).

Good examples of *pailísse* survive on the Ballydoogan lands of the Ó Dubhgháin *ollamh* in *senchas* in the lordship of Uí Mhaine and on the landholding of Mac Fhirbhisigh of Lackan in Tir Fhiachrach (Fig. 7). The townlands of Pullis Upper and Lower and Pallishill, in the Lagan of Leinster, constituted the landholding of the MacEochadha poets as recorded in the fiants for the late sixteenth century. A branch of the Ó Dáláigh poets was also resident there in the same period. There are two moated sites in Pullis Lower, one of which has a substantial platform, 36m by 35m, and an impressive bank with typically upturned corners and an external fosse. The larger of the two sites could have had its genesis as a *pailís* of the Uí Cheinnsealáigh, and it may be the case that vacated lordly *pailísse* situated on the patrimonial lands of a ruling family were re-used as the locations for later medieval learned family dwellings and schools.

**Conclusions**

The multiple and often indivisible roles performed by the learned classes in Gaelic society are best perceived by combining different kinds of evidence of their lifeways. Esoteric and practical, traditional and innovative, learned men were much more than mandarins. Understanding their

---

concerns and ways of life inevitably evokes the past. Place-names inscribe their landholdings with meaning, revealing topographical features, settlements, former hunting grounds, livestock parks and significant antique landscapes that were their professional inheritance. Learned family settlements were composite, and by the end of the late medieval period they incorporated the residence of the ollamh, often with a guest-house, a schoolhouse, agricultural features, possibly mines, prehistoric and early medieval antiquities, and, if the ollamh was also a comharba or an airchinneach, a church and a saintly cult site. A range of site types constituted the dwellings of this class, from traditional crannóg or inis, caiseal and pailis to the new architectural form of the tower house. This nuance in settlement forms can be attributed to complex processes of territorial continuity and settlement change and to the geography of their lands within the lordship. Many secular learned families, as service providers to the courts of Gaelic lords, were situated on mensal land of the lordships, which was inheritable land attached to the office of chief and which could not be redistributed. Therefore, they occupied or lay close to some of the most historically significant tracts of land that contained the signature sites of early medieval dynasties, such as royal dwellings and settlements, assembly sites, antique landscapes and natural resources such as woodland, designated hunting grounds and mineral deposits that may have been exploited for earlier metallurgy. Like other service families on mensal land, learned families had access to this heady, long-lived environment. On their own holdings and within the bounds of the lordships that they served, they may also have been active in naming and re-naming places with reference to mythological heroes and events. Thereby, they continued to layer the past into the present.

An important consequence of exploring learned family lifeways is the realisation that their landholdings are a portal through which earlier medieval royal demesne-lands and church lands can be reached, and from which the basis for parkland on many of the early modern country estates of Ireland can be better understood.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to the organising committee of the Congress, and to the Fulbright Commission and Celtic Languages and Literatures, Harvard University, for the opportunity to advance the ideas in this paper. Special thanks to Paul Ferguson (The Map Library, Trinity College Dublin) for sourcing Fig. 1, and to Paul Naessens and Rory Sherlock for maps and plans.

1–2.
2–100.
Wexford (Dublin, 1996), 107.