



Provided by the author(s) and NUI Galway in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite the published version when available.

Title	Ollamh, biatach, comharba: lifeways of Gaelic learned families in medieval and early modern Ireland
Author(s)	FitzPatrick, Elizabeth
Publication Date	2015
Publication Information	Elizabeth FitzPatrick (2015) Ollamh, biatach, comharba: lifeways of Gaelic learned families in medieval and early modern Ireland Proceedings of the XIVth International Celtic Congress, Maynooth 2011
Publisher	Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies
Link to publisher's version	https://books.dias.ie/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=382
Item record	http://hdl.handle.net/10379/5947

Downloaded 2017-10-31T07:40:39Z

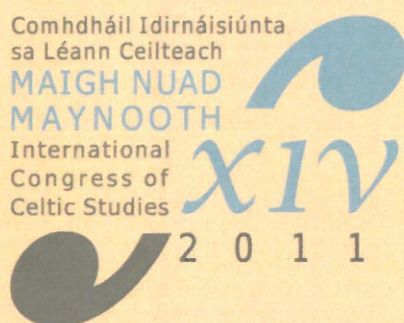
Some rights reserved. For more information, please see the item record link above.



An XIV Comhdháil Idirnáisiúnta sa Léann Ceilteach

MAIGH NUAD 2011

IMEACHTAÍ



PROCEEDINGS

XIV International Congress of Celtic Studies

MAYNOOTH 2011

EAGARTHÓIRÍ

**LIAM BREATNACH, RUAIRÍ Ó hUIGINN,
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

Arna fhoilsiú ag/Published by

Scoil an Léinn Cheiltigh, Institiúid Ard-Léinn Bhaile Átha Cliath
School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies

© 2015

Institiúid Ard-Léinn Bhaile Átha Cliath / Dublin Institute for
Advanced Studies and the authors

ISBN 978-1-85500-229-6

Cóip-eagarthóir/Copyeditor: Helena King
Clóchur/Typeset: Datapage International Ltd
Clóbhuailte ag/Printed by: Dundalgan Press Ltd

OLLAMH, BIATACH, COMHARBA: LIFEWAYS OF GAELIC 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 economy³, dwellings⁴ and warfare;⁵ and Damian McManus has proposed a setting for the grammatical tracts, through his exploration of the environment of the bardic school.⁶

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

¹ See, P. Walsh, *Irish men of learning* (Dublin, 1947); J. Bannerman, *The Beatores: a medical kindred in the classical Gaelic tradition* (Edinburgh, 1998); N. Ó Muraíle, *The celebrated antiquary: Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh (c.1600–1671): his life, lineage and learning* (Maynooth, 1996).

² See, S. Mac Airt, *Leabhar Branach: the book of the O'Byrnes* (Dublin, 1944); O. Bergin, *Irish bardic poetry* (Dublin, 1970); D. Greene, *Duanaire Mhéig Uidhir: the poembook of Cú Chonnacht Mág Uidhir, lord of Fermanagh 1566–1589* (Dublin, 1972). F. Kelly (ed.), *Audacht Morainn* (Dublin, 1976); N. Ó Muraíle (ed.), *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach: The Great Book of Irish Genealogies compiled (1645–66) by Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh*, 5 vols (Dublin, 2003–4); L. Breatnach, *A companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (Dublin, 2005); A. Nic Dhonnchadha, 'The medical school of Aghmacart, Queen's County', *Ossory, Laois and Leinster* 2 (2006), 11–43; B. Cunningham, *The Annals of the Four Masters: Irish history, kingship and society in the early seventeenth century* (Dublin, 2010); P. Ó Macháin, *The Book of the O'Connor Don: essays on an Irish manuscript* (Dublin, 2010).

³ K. Simms, 'References to landscape and economy in Irish bardic poetry', in H.B. Clarke, J. Prunty and M. Hennessy (eds), *Surveying Ireland's past: multidisciplinary essays in honour of Anngret Simms* (Dublin, 2004), 145–68.

⁴ K. Simms, 'Native sources for Gaelic settlement: the house poems', in P.J. Duffy, D. Edwards and E. FitzPatrick (eds), *Gaelic Ireland: land, lordship and settlement* (Dublin, 2001), 246–67.

⁵ K. Simms, 'Images of warfare in bardic poetry', *Celtica* 21 (1990), 608–19.

⁶ D. McManus, 'The bardic poet as teacher, student and critic: a context for the grammatical tracts', in C.G. Ó Háinle and D.E. Meek (eds), *Unity in diversity: studies in Irish and Scottish Gaelic language, literature and history* (Dublin, 2004), 97–123.

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.⁷ Manuscripts of the schools also tended to contain a broad range of material, not just profession-specific texts. In the sixteenth century, the Uí Dhuibh dá 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 Fionn 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.⁸

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 Uí Chinnéidigh of Urmhumha Íochtarach and to the Uí Lochlainn of Boireann.⁹ 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', *Ériu* 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 *Orait don te ro scribh in leabur sa o thus co deiredh. A Cathair Meic Nechtain a farrad Ara na mBreó a tindscnad: 7 a forba a mBaile McClandcada a farrad mo goisde .i. Domhnall Óg Ma (d) Clanncada. Mise Forandan qui scribsit sin do fein 7 dag ach aon darub toil do Dia 7 is i ais in Domini .i. 2 bliadain .x. 7 dá .xx.it 7 .u.c. 7 0000 [leg. 1000] bliadna [= 1552] cus in Nodlaig so cugam, caoicis 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 (NUI, Galway) for this translation and for drawing my attention to the colophon.*

⁹ AFM 1425.12: 'Mac Gowan of the Stories, i.e. Thomas, son of Gilla-na-naev Mac Gowan, Ollav to O'Loughlin of Corcomroe in history, died'.

mid-fourteenth century for Giolla Ruadháin Ua Macáin, *comharba* of the church of St Ruadhán of Lorrha in Urmhumha Íochtarach.¹⁰ The Ormond Meic an Ghabhann are associated with Béal Átha Ghobhann (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 *fili*, but who also has access to legal knowledge and the craft of the smith.¹¹

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 *airchinneach* (steward of church lands and buildings), and a *biatach* (food provider/hospitaller) or *fear tighe aoidheadh* (guest-house keeper).¹² 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 upstanding 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.

LANDHOLDING 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, fiants 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 Dhálaigh of Muintir Bháire in the lordship of Fionn Iartharach, within the Mac Carthaigh Riabhach overlordship of Cairbre in west Cork, and the Mac an Bhaird 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 Bhaird of Uí Mhaine.

¹⁰ Ms. Rawl. B.486, part ii; F.J. Byrne, *A thousand years of Irish script* (Oxford, 1979), 21.

¹¹ J.F. Nagy, *The wisdom of the outlaw: the boyhood 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 hospitaller, but also the various other types of guesthouse-keepers in medieval Ireland'.

Both are associated with the midland monastic schools. Among the excellent aids to identifying the holdings of migrant branches of learned families, especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, are T.F. O'Rahilly's (1922) 'Irish poets, historians and judges in English documents, 1538–1615'; A.J. Hughes' (1994–5) 'Land acquisition by Gaelic bardic poets: insights from place-names and other sources'; and L. McInerney's (2008) 'The West Clann Chuiléin lordship in 1586'.

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.¹³ 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 ballybetaghs—covering 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.¹⁴ 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 1—Some correspondences between landholding place-names and learned family names.

<i>Placename</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>Profession</i>	<i>Lordship</i>
Ballybrody	Mac Bruaideadha	Poetry	West Clann Chuiléin
Ballydoogan	Ó Dubhagáin	<i>Senchas</i>	Uí Mhaine
Ballygown	Mac an Ghabhann	<i>Senchas</i>	Urmhumha Íochtarach
Ballyhickey	Ó hÍceadha	Medicine	West Clann Chuiléin
Ballyhose	Ó hEodhasa	Poetry	Fir Mhanach
Ballymacaward	Mac an Bhaird	Poetry	Tír Conaill
Ballymackegan	Mac Aodhagáin	Law	Southern Anghaile
Ballyroney	Ó Ruanadha	Poetry	Uí Eachach Cobha

¹³ J. Leerssen, *The Contention of the Bards: Iomarbhágh na bhFileadh and its place in Irish political and literary history*, Irish Texts Society subsidiary series 2 (London, 1994), 17.

¹⁴ Cited in T.F. O'Rahilly, 'Irish poets, historians, and judges in English documents, 1538–1615, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Section C* 36 (1922), 86–120: 94.

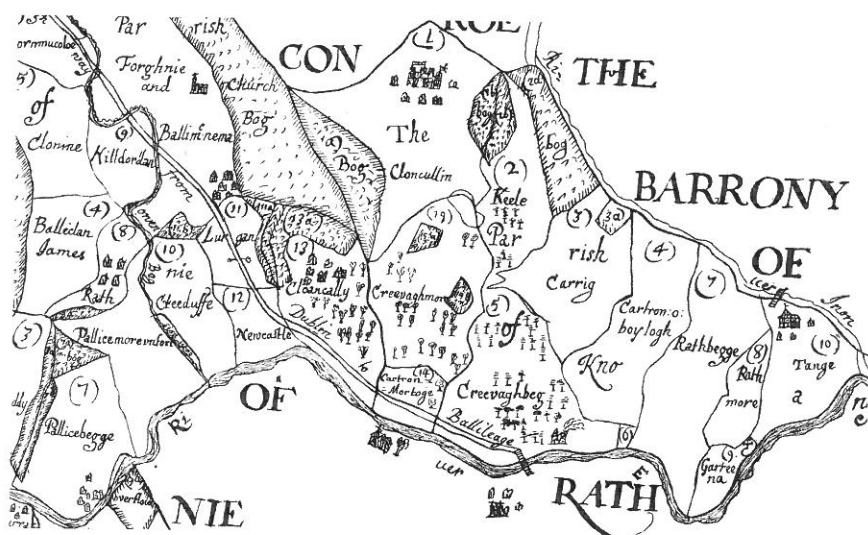


FIG. 1—Extract from the Down Survey parish map of Noughaval, Shrule, Co. Longford, showing the townland of Carrickbeg (Carrig) that formed the core of the former Ballymackeagan landholding of the Meic Aodhagáin brehons in law to the Ó Fearghail Buidhe of Pallas. Note the woodland of Creevaghbeg and Creevaghmore, which was the site of a livestock raid in 1468 (Reproduced courtesy of Trinity College Dublin).

included 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 Ballymackegan, contains two deer parks associated with the nearby King-Harman 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 emparked 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 Creevagh Beg (An Chraobhach Bheag) and Creevagh More (An Chraobhach Mhór) that adjoin Carrickbeg (see Fig. 1), indicate a bushy or branchy landscape which would have been an appropriate

¹⁵ King-Harman estates. Rent book of the Newcastle estate, Co. Longford, between 1782 and 1846 Dublin: Public Record Office (PRO), M. 1259–1278. The King-Harman family owned the largest estate in Co. Longford in the nineteenth century, with its seat at Newcastle House, near Ballymahon 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 Craibech hi cois Ethne*', a plundering expedition conducted by Ó Conchobhair Failghe on Creevagh, by the River Inny, during which some forty of their packhorses [*da n-echaib imachair*] were taken.¹⁶

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'.¹⁷ 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 immrimme*.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ A eulogy for the Mág Shamhradháin chief of Tellach nEachach exclaims that he 'keeps all poets alive – such hospitality! Few Gaoidhil are freer in giving horses, he refuses nothing to any man.'²¹

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 Uí Chobhthaigh poets at Ballinkeeny,²² which became Mosstown House demesne, southwest of the village of Killare in Westmeath, the emarked landscape includes areas designated as 'horse park' and 'race park'. East of the Meic an Ghabhann lands at Béal Átha Ghobhann (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

¹⁶ AConn 1468.38.

¹⁷ K.W. Nicholls, *Gaelic and gaelicized Ireland in the middle ages* (Dublin, 2003), 138.

¹⁸ F. Kelly, *Early Irish farming* (Dublin, 2000), 89–90.

¹⁹ I am grateful to Katharine Simms for pointing this out.

²⁰ N.J.A. Williams (ed. and trans.), *The poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe*, Irish Texts Society 51 (Dublin, 1980), 111 [X:13].

²¹ L. McKenna (ed.), *The Book of Magauran: Leabhar Méig Shamhradháin* (Dublin, 1947), 59 [VII: 7].

²² O'Rahilly, 'Irish poets, historians and judges', 108–9.

the Uí Cheinnsealaigh on the Wexford–Wicklow border. The site of the inauguration place of the Uí Cheinnsealaigh is Loggan Lower townland, southwest of which is Pallis where the Meic Eochadha poets were located.²³ They were the hereditary inaugurators of the Uí Cheinnsealaigh and their role is encapsulated in the assembly site name, Leac Mhic Eochadha, as recorded by Keating.²⁴ West of Pallis and southwest of Loggan Lower there is a group of townlands around Buckstown House demesne that are named: Knocknagapple, Racecourse, Deerpark. These, together with the assembly site, the *pailís* 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 Cheinnsealaigh.

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 Uí 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 Uí Néill of Tír Eoghain—‘On the night that he is in Ard Sratha his table is supplied by Mac Conmidhe from Loch Í Mhaoldubháin, the Reciter’s land’—in *Sliocht Airt Uí Néill*.²⁵ The respective representatives of the Mic Con Midhe in poetry regarded this land, central to which was Loch Í Mhaoldubháin, as integral to their hereditary office, but it was forfeited in 1435 because the *ollamh* offended Ó Néill.²⁶

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.²⁷

‘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.

²⁴ P.S. Dinneen (ed. and trans), *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, vol 3. Irish Texts Society 15 (London, 1914), 14–15; E. FitzPatrick, *Royal inauguration in Gaelic Ireland c.1100–1600: a cultural landscape study* (Woodbridge, 2004), 91–2, 104.

²⁵ M. Dillon, ‘Ceart Uí Néill’, *Studia Celtica* 1 (1966), 1–18: 8; Williams, *The poems of Giolla Brighde*, 2.

²⁶ G. Ó Riain, ‘Dán réitigh le Conchobhar Ruadh Mac Con Midhe (d. 1481)’, in P.A. Breatnach (ed.), *Léann lámhscríbhinní Lobháin* (Dublin, 2007); K. Simms, *From kings to warlords: the changing political structure of Gaelic Ireland in the later middle ages* (Woodbridge, 1987), 87.

²⁷ A. Keaveney and J.A. Madden (eds), *Sir William Herbert: Croftus sive de Hibernia liber* (Dublin, 1992), 107, 109.

lands of the Uí Dhálaigh poets of Muintir Bháire, which is synonymous with Sheepshead peninsula and Kilcrohane 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 Dhálaigh.²⁸ The circumstance in which the Uí Dhálaigh 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 Dhálaigh onto the Muintir 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 Dhálaigh line of Muintir Bháire, in his poem *Gabh mo gherán a Sheóirse* ('Heed, O George, my complaint'), addressed to Sir George Carew. Tadhg wrote:

*Rinn cheana do chinn fhine
mar fuair cenn ar gceirdi-ne;
déantar lat úaisle oram
glac an uair-se a uraghall.*

'The head of our poetic family once got a promontory 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 overlooking 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 maintained possession of monastic termonland as *comharbai* 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.

²⁹ AI 1198.5.

³⁰ A. O'Sullivan, 'Tadhg O'Daly and Sir George Carew', *Éigse* 14 (1971–20), 27–38: 30.

³¹ 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.

³² J.S. Brewer and W. Bullen (eds), *Calendar of the Carew Papers 1589–1600* (London, 1869), 352.

³³ P. Mac Cana, 'The rise of the later schools of *filidheacht*', *Ériu* 25 (1974), 126–46: 127–30; R. Flower, *The Irish tradition* (Oxford, 1947), 84.

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 Duibhgeannáin *comharba* of Cill Rónáin who was *ollamh* in *senchas* to Mac Diarmada of Magh Luirg. Cill Rónáin is situated on the northern shore of Loch Mór Máothla (Lough Meelagh) north of Boyle in Co. Roscommon (Fig. 2). Several branches of the Uí Dhuibhgeannáin are found in north Connacht practising *senchas* in the later medieval period and, as Simms has observed, they are typical of the schools of *senchas* 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 *senchas* to Clann Mhaoil Ruanaidh at the Cill Rónáin 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 Duibhgeannáin as, at once, an *ollamh*, a *biatach*, a guest-house keeper and *comharba* of St Lasair;³⁵ and Dolbh Ó Duibhgeannáin

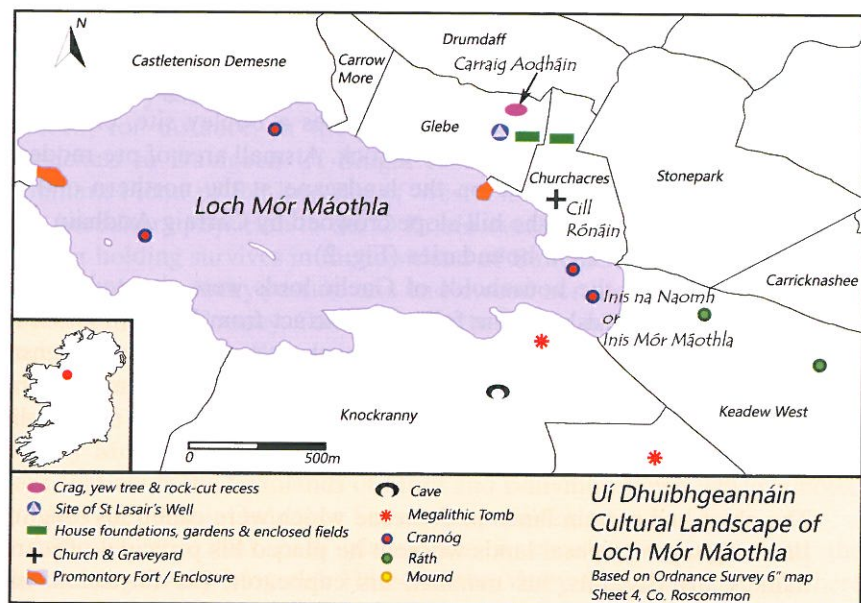


FIG. 2—The cultural landscape of Loch Mór Máothla showing the lands of the Ó Duibhgeannáin *comharba* of Cill Rónáin and *ollamh* in *senchas* to the Mac Diarmada of Magh Luirg. (Drawing by Rory Sherlock based on Ordnance Survey 6-inch map, sheet 4, Co. Roscommon).

³⁴ K. Simms, 'Bardic schools, learned families', in S. Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Ireland: an encyclopedia* (New York and London, 2005), 35–7: 36.

³⁵ ACLon 1398.

who died in 1578 is described as ‘a learned historian, who kept a thronged house of general hospitality’.³⁶ Lasair, the saint to whom Ó Duibhgeannáin was *comharba*, was allegedly the daughter of Rónán, who gives his name to the medieval parish and church of Cill Rónáin. The cult of St Lasair was maintained by the *comharba* and a Life of Lasair was compiled by David Ó Duibhgeannáin in 1670.³⁷ Indications of the more pragmatic role of the Ó Duibhgeannáin *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 Rónáin in 1488 refers to him as ‘the richest of the literati of Ireland in flocks and herds’.³⁸ The Cill Rónáin 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 Kilronan 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 glogh (= *Ceathramhain na gCloch*), signifying rocky pasture. Noteworthy too is the townland named Curraghnaboley 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 loughtry [*lucht tighe*], or mensal lands wherein he placed his principal officers, namely his Brehons, 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...³⁹

³⁶ AFM 1578.

³⁷ L. Gwynn (ed.), ‘The Life of St Lasair’, *Ériu* 5 (1911), 73–109.

³⁸ AFM 1488.

³⁹ PRO London SP 63/226 No. 8; H. Morgan (ed.), ‘The Lawes of Irelande: a tract by Sir John Davies’, *Irish Jurist* 28–30 (1993–5), 311.

In return for his professional services, an *ollamh* of a learned family on mensal land was immune from paying *cíos* or tribute, which was generally an annual payment,⁴⁰ 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 Cianáin, chronicler to the Méig Uidhir of Fir Mhanach, observed that he had owned, and by then had forfeited, 15 cows, 8 calves, 1 garran (work-horse), 1 hackney (riding-horse) and 25 swine.⁴¹ In the circumstances of the Nine Years' War and its aftermath, this record may reflect Ó Cianáin's livestock at a significantly 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 hÍceadha physicians at Ballyhickey consisted of one-and-a-half quarters of mensal land.⁴² The following reading of the lands of the Ó hÍceadha *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 hÍceadha physicians to Daingean Uí Bhigin castle, the principal seat of the Mac Conmara Fionn of the lordship of West Clann Chuiléin. Ó hÍceadha 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 underwood north 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.⁴³ 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 Moyreisk House of the Vesey Fitzgerald family,⁴⁴ there

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.

⁴² L. McInerney, 'The West Clann Chuiléin lordship in 1586: evidence from a forgotten inquisition', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal* 48 (2008), 33–62: 47, 60.

⁴³ J. Hickey, 'The O'Hickeys: hereditary physicians to the O'Briens of Thomond and some of their descendants', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal* 8 (1958), 38–41.

⁴⁴ Prior to that the Moyreisk 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 Ballymackegan. 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 Clérigh 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 *páirc* 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 dá Bhoireann and his Burren school were frequently based in the Mac Aodhagáin school at Páirc in the McDavid-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^o, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin Ms 23 Q 6; pp 33–52).⁴⁵ In that manuscript several of the scribes note their location as 'in the Park':

Mei est incipere Dei est infinire .i. do Domnall ó Dhuibh dhá boirenn in aidchi iar féil Bri[gh]de 1569. ar in páirc atú.

'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

⁴⁵ W. O'Sullivan, 'The book of Domhnall Ó Duibhdábhoireann, provenance and codicology', *Celtica* 23 (1999), 276–98.

⁴⁶ S.H. O'Grady, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1926), 108.

Still more interesting is the repeated use of deer imagery, sketched in ink in a naive 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 Ballyhickey townland, close to the boundary with Moyreisk, 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 Urmhumha Íochtarach, is centred on the silver mines that give their name to the later town of Silvermines, Co. Tipperary, and that the landholding of the Clare branch of that sept, at Coskeam in the lordship of Boireann, is flanked to the west by Ailwee Mountain where deposits of lead and silver were mined in the nineteenth century. On the Muintir Bháire lands of the Uí Dhálaigh there are deposits of copper in Gortavallig and silver in Killoveenoge, appropriately overlooked by 'Seefin' (Suidhe Fhinn; Fig. 3), the highest point of the Sheepshead peninsula. 'Knockseefin' in Lackanascarry townland overlooks Pallas Grean village and Pallashill—an area of significant zinc-lead mineralisation⁴⁸ in Co. Limerick—where a branch of the Méig Craith poets of Garrison resided in the sixteenth century.⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰ 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 tigh*e 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

⁴⁷ O'Sullivan, 'The book of Domhnall Ó Duibhdábhoireann', 287.

⁴⁸ D. Blaney, 'The geology, alteration and mineralization of the Pallas Green Prospect, Co. Limerick', *International Geochemical Exploration Symposium and North Atlantic Mineral Symposium: abstracts* (Dublin, 2003), 107–9.

⁴⁹ O'Rahilly, 'Irish poets, historians and judges', 93–4.

⁵⁰ Simms, 'Bardic schools', 37.



FIG. 3—Seefin Mountain (Suidhe Fhinn) referencing the mythical hero Fionn mac Cumhaill, on the landholding of the Uí Dhálaigh poets of Muintir Bháire, Sheepshhead peninsula, Co. Cork (photo: E. FitzPatrick).

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 *Tóruigheacht 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’.⁵¹

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’.⁵² 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 Uí Dhálaigh poets at Dromnea and Farranmanagh, on the Sheepshhead peninsula in Co. Cork,

⁵¹ Nagy, *The wisdom of the outlaw*, 34–5.

⁵² Simms, ‘References to landscape and economy’, 146.



FIG. 4—View over Loch Mór Máothla from the medieval parish church of Cill Rónáin (photo: E. FitzPatrick).

affords an outstanding view to the Beara peninsula. The location of the Uí Dhuibhgeannáin settlement on a terraced hillside below Kilronan 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 (*fili*) 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'Sullethane's account is supported by the evidence of poetry'.⁵⁴ O'Sullethane 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'.⁵⁵ 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 Máothla there are several court tombs and a large tumulus. Within 50m of a *ráth* and just north of the schoolhouse of the Uí Dhálaigh of Dromnea on the Sheepshead peninsula there was a monumental stone row, unfortunately cleared during land improvements.⁵⁶ 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 landscape⁵⁷ 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 Uí 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 Uí 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 Ríogh, the assembly place of the Magennis of Iveagh, is found on the lands of the Ó Ruanadha poets at Lisnacroppan, just southwest of the auspiciously named Seafin [Suidhe Fhinn] in Ballyroneigh parish, Co. Down.

⁵⁴ McManus, 'The bardic poet as teacher', 97–123: 121.

⁵⁵ *Memoirs of the Right Honourable the Marquis of Clanricarde, Lord Deputy General of Ireland. . . With a digression containing several curious observations concerning the antiquities of Ireland* (Dublin, 1744), 107–8.

⁵⁶ *Ordnance Survey Memorandums for Co. Cork*, vol. 2, 457–8.

⁵⁷ 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 Ó Cléirigh families, and which forms part of the Saltair of Edmund mac Richard Butler, who was the cousin of the Butler Earl of Ormond.⁵⁸ 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 Rathen 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 Óengus mac Nad Froích which is now called Pottlerath...⁵⁹

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 *pailís* 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

⁵⁸ F.J. Byrne, *A thousand years of Irish script* (Oxford, 1979), 25–7

⁵⁹ Bodleian Library Ms Laud Misc.610, fol. 61v; Byrne, *A thousand years*, 26.

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 Uí Chléirigh inherited from their predecessors, the Uí Scingin, with whom they had intermarried (Fig. 5).⁶⁰ 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 Uí 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',⁶¹ 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'.⁶² 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'.⁶³ 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 Uí 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.⁶⁴ 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 AFM 1492; AConn 1492.7.

⁶² AFM 1556.

⁶³ Cited in Cunningham, *The Annals of the Four Masters*, 258.

⁶⁴ S. Mac Airt and T. Ó Fiaich (eds), 'A thirteenth century poem on Armagh cathedral by Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe', *Seanchas Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society* 2, No. 1 (1956), 145–162: 146.

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 Tír Eoghain, died at Loch Laoghaire.⁶⁹ These references have been interpreted as evidence that the *inis* 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 Fhiachrach Arda Sratha and that Island McHugh was

⁶⁵ Williams, *The poems of Giolla Brighde*, 151 [XIII:52].

⁶⁶ E. Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum: locorum et tribuum Hiberniae et Scotiae* (Dublin 1910), 500.

⁶⁷ M. Dobbs, 'Some ancient place-names', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 16 (1926), 106–18: 107.

⁶⁸ Williams, *The poems of Giolla Brighde*, 150, 309.

⁶⁹ AFM 1325.1.

⁷⁰ N. Brady and K. O'Connor, 'The later medieval usage of crannogs in Ireland', *Ruralia* 5 (2005), 127–36.

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.

⁷³ R.J. Ivens and D.D.A. Simpson, 'Excavations at Lislear, Baronscourt, Co. Tyrone', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology, Third Series*, 51 (1988), 61–68:61.

perhaps their 'bolt-hole'.⁷⁴ 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 Uí Néill of Tír Eoghain, 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 Uí Thighearnáin. In 1446 the Ó Cobhthaigh *ollamh* and his two sons were murdered on the tiny island which accommodated their small tower house—

Domnall O Cobthaig and his two sons were treacherously killed by Maelsechlainn son of the son of Art O Mailsechlainn 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.⁷⁵

The tower house was revealed during excavations by R.A.S. Macalister who misinterpreted the structure as a modern folly.⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷ Just as the primary medieval occupation of Loch Laoghaire/Loch Í Mhaoldubháin, and very likely its onshore Dún Laoghaire, 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 Uí Néill high kings in the tenth and eleventh century. The death of the high king Máelseachnaill on Cró-inis is recorded for AD 1022—'Maelseachlainn Mor, son of Domhnall, son of Donnchadh, pillar of the dignity and nobility of the west of the world, died on Cro-inis Locha-Aininn, after having been forty-three years in sovereignty over Ireland'.⁷⁸ The Annals of Clonmacnoise provide the important detail that he died 'in Croinnis upon Logh Innill neere his house of Doone Sgiath'.⁷⁹ Warner has also commented on this pairing of sites and surmised that the

⁷⁴ R. Warner, 'On crannogs and kings', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 57 (1994), 61–9: 68.

⁷⁵ AConn 1446.2.

⁷⁶ R.A.S. Macalister, 'On an excavation conducted on Cro-Inis, Loch Ennell', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Section C* 44 (1937–8), 248–52.

⁷⁷ R.T. Farrell and V. Buckley, 'Preliminary examination of the potential of offshore and underwater sites in Loughs Ennell and Analla, Co. Westmeath, Ireland', *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 13 (1984), 281–5; E.P. Kelly, 'Observations on Irish lakes', in C. Karkov and R.T. Farrell (eds), *Studies in insular art and archaeology*, *American Early Medieval Studies* 1, 81–98.

⁷⁸ AFM 1022.2.

⁷⁹ AClon 1022.

island on which Máelseachnaill died 'seems to have been some sort of adjunct, perhaps a secondary dwelling, a personal retreat'.⁸⁰

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 *bruidhne* (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 *airchinneach*. 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*, *biatach* or hospitaller 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 Duibhgeannáin *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 Duibhgeannáin 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 Duibh dá Bhoireann *ollamh*'s residence, was a *caiseal* (Fig. 6) situated on his landholding of Cathair Mhic Neachtain, at least until the late sixteenth century when the Composition of Connacht (1585) records the *ollamh*,

⁸⁰ Warner, 'On crannogs and kings', 63.

⁸¹ A. and M.O. Andersen (eds and trans), *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (Oxford, 1961), 87 i. 48.

⁸² Gwynn, 'Life of St Lasair', 97, 99.



FIG. 6—Cathair Mhic Neachtain, *caiseal* residence of the Ó Duibh dá Bhoireann *ollamh* in law to the Ó Lochlainn chief of Boireann before the late sixteenth century. The *ollamh* was living in a tower house at nearby Lissylisheen by the end of the sixteenth century. The *caiseal* was shared between his sons as a result of land division in 1606 (photo: E. FitzPatrick).

Giolla na Naomh, living in the small tower house of Lissylisheen directly south of Cahermacnaghten townland.⁸³ By 1601 the *caiseal* was the property of Aodh,⁸⁴ 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.⁸⁵ 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.⁸⁶ The *caiseal* is generally regarded as the site of the Ó Duibh dá 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 excavation⁸⁷ 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

⁸³ A.M. Freeman (ed.), 1936 *The compasscion booke of Conought of 1585* (Dublin 1936), 7.

⁸⁴ K.W. Nicholls (ed.), *The Irish fiants of the Tudor sovereigns*, vol. 3, 1586–1603 (Dublin, 1994), 505–6.

⁸⁵ G.U. Macnamara, 'The O'Davorens of Cahermacnaghten, Burren, Co. Clare', *North Munster Archaeological Society Journal* 2, (1912–13), 63–212: 75–6.

⁸⁶ E. FitzPatrick, 'Native enclosed settlement and the problem of the Irish "ring-fort"', *Medieval Archaeology* 53 (2009), 271–307: 298–300.

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 *scoilteagh* or schoolhouse. A total of four licences to excavate were held between 2007 and 2010 (07E0395, 08E435, 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 sequestered 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 *pailís*, which is variously translated as a stockade or fortified enclosure and more poetically as a palace.⁹⁰ In bardic poetry the *pailís* as the setting for a significant timber house, has royal associations, the most renowned *pailís* being that of the Ó Conchobhair ‘king of Connacht’ at Cluain Fraoich 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 *pailís* has a greater distribution, reflected in townland names that incorporate the term, and it is frequently associated with learned families.

⁸⁸ Simms, ‘Bardic schools, learned families’, 35.

⁸⁹ Writing from the Mac Aodhagáin school at Park in the sixteenth century, one of Domhnall Ó Duibh dá Bhoireann’s scribes, while working on Domhnall’s legal glossary, scribbled this marginal comment—*Is minic tic Gerailt do túr lúderim don sgoilteagh uchán*. ‘Gerald keeps on coming too often to the schoolhouse in quest of certain girls of mine’ (*lúderim* read as an anagram for *der lium*); 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 bhfhocair mo magistir agus mo brathar a ttech na sgoili a nAchadh Mhic Airt in .6. la do Mharta agus dar mo urethir sum iotmhar ocarac.1590’, ‘... in the company of my master and kinsman [Donnchadh Óg Ó Conchubhair] in the schoolhouse in Aghmacart on the 6th day of March. And upon my word, I am thirsty and hungry; 1590’, Nic Dhonnchadha, ‘The medical school’, 13–14.

⁹⁰ *DIL* s.v. *pailís*.

⁹¹ E.C. Quiggin (ed. and trans.), ‘O’Conor’s 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.

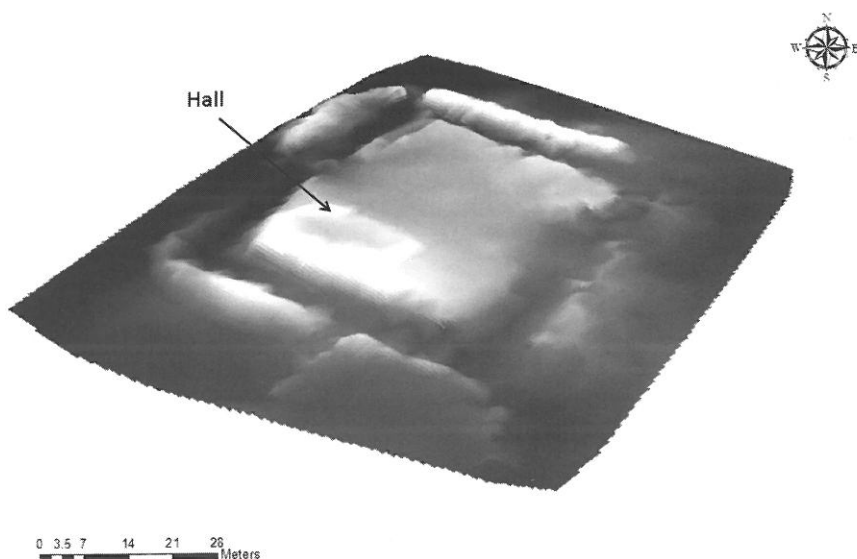


FIG. 7—A large moated site with a possible *pailís* or hall-type building on the platform and a D-shaped annexe outside the defenses at southwest, situated on the Mac Fírbhisigh landholding at Lackan in Tír Fhiachrach, Co. Sligo (plan: Paul Naessens).

Good examples of *pailíse* survive on the Ballydoogan lands of the Ó Dubhagáin *ollamh* in *senchas* in the lordship of Uí Mhaine and on the landholding of Mac Fírbhisigh of Lackan in Tír Fhiachrach (Fig. 7). The townlands of Pallis 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.⁹³ A branch of the Ó Dálaigh poets was also resident there in the same period.⁹⁴ There are two moated sites in Pallis Lower, one of which has a substantial platform, 36m by 35m, and an impressive bank with typically upturned corners and an external fosse.⁹⁵ The larger of the two sites could have had its genesis as a *pailís* of the Uí Cheinnsealaigh, and it may be the case that vacated lordly *pailíse* 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

⁹³ O'Rahilly, 'Irish poets, historians and judges', 91–2.

⁹⁴ O'Rahilly, 'Irish poets, historians and judges', 99–100.

⁹⁵ M.J. Moore, *Archaeological inventory of County Wexford* (Dublin, 1996), 107.

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 *pailís* 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.