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CHAPTER 20

The Irish language in County Meath, 1700-1900

LESA NÍ MHUNGHAILÉ¹

Writing in 1933, Énrí Ó Muirgheasa (1874-1945), the Irish-language scholar of the Gaelic Revival and collector of Irish-language manuscripts, described how in 1903 he had tried to purchase a manuscript penned by the Moynalty scribe Peadar Ó Gealacháin (Peter Galligan, 1792-1860) from its owner, Tom Boylan of Cruisetown, Nobber. Boylan, who was an Irish speaker and could read the manuscript, had refused to sell it, however, as it was the last relic of Ó Gealacháin that remained in Nobber. On his death soon after that, the codex passed into the custody of Owen Smith of Nobber. Although Smith had no literary knowledge of the Irish language, he also refused to sell the manuscript to Ó Muirgheasa, because: 'I want to keep it here to show that there was once learning in Nobber'.² A rich literary tradition, incorporating both the manuscript and oral traditions survived in Meath down to the nineteenth century and as Ó Muirgheasa stated: 'the literary knowledge of the language accompanied the spoken tongue right down to its grave'.³ It was in north Meath that the Gaelic literary tradition finally died out around the middle of the nineteenth century, having been in gradual retreat from the south of the county from the end of the eighteenth century. The spoken language fared slightly better and despite being situated within the anglicized pale, Meath was one of three Leinster counties in which spoken Irish survived the longest, the others being Louth and Kilkenny. This chapter will trace the fortunes of the Irish language in Meath, in both its spoken and written forms, over the course of two hundred years, examining a variety of sources that includes travel accounts, statistical and parochial surveys, census returns and Irish-language manuscripts.

Survival of the spoken language 1700-1900

The dialect of Irish spoken in Meath, in the area stretching from the northern boundary with Cavan, Louth and Monaghan as far as the Boyne Valley, was a sub-dialect of that spoken in the south-east Ulster region known as Oirialla

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(Oriel), which was also comprised of Armagh, Monaghan and Louth.⁴ North Meath is generally regarded as belonging to Oriel with which it shared a common manuscript and folklore tradition. Based on extensive research on the Irish-language dialects of Leinster, the scholar Donn Piatt stated with conviction that ‘the northern parts of Meath’ belonged ‘indisputably to Ulster, linguistically speaking’ and that Ulster forms such as ‘Godé mar tá tú?’ (how are you?) survived as far south as Trim.⁵ Seosamh Laoide believed that the dialect of Irish spoken should be regarded as a sub-dialect because it had some variations of its own both in phrase and idiom and ‘a few grammatical usages and several of the sounds differ’. He also posited that the Irish spoken in the barony of Farney in Co. Monaghan, which demonstrated ‘an occasional agreement with Meath’ should be regarded as a ‘borderland between the two varieties [of Irish spoken]’.⁶ Place names in the district of Kilskeer and Girley, which was an Irish-speaking area up to the period 1840-70, also provide clues to various pronunciations and indicate that the dialect of Irish spoken was ‘similar to that found in the Donegal Gaeltacht’.⁷ In south Meath, the sub-dialect of Irish that prevailed had a closer affinity with Lagenian Irish, the dialect of central and south-east Leinster, which was closely related to the Connaught dialect.⁸ In addition to the important recording work undertaken by Piatt, a further source exists for examples of the dialect of Irish spoken in Meath, namely the many manuscripts written by scribes such as Aodh Mac Domhnaill (Hugh McDonnell) (1802–1867) and Peadar Ó Gealacháin during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁹

Travel accounts, statistical and parochial surveys carried out by local Protestant clergy and estimates of the number of Irish speakers by Protestant evangelists are important sources of information for the survival of the Irish language in the nineteenth century, at a time of great change in the fortunes of the language throughout the country. Robert Thompson of Oatland House, Ardbracon, was the author of *Statistical survey of the county of Meath* published in 1802 in which he made the following observation on the state of the Irish language:

The English language is pretty generally in use throughout the county, and we very seldom meet with any person, who is not capable of speaking it with some degree of fluency; yet, when together, the peasants all converse, and if they have a story to tell, or a complaint to make, they still wish to be heard in Irish; understanding the idioms of that language better than they possibly can those of English, their story can be conveyed more expressively, and, of course, work more upon the feelings of their auditors; indeed there is no language more copiously supplied with pathetic expressions, or more calculated to touch the feelings, than that of the Irish; so much so, that it has become a proverbial expression, “Plead for your life in Irish”.¹⁰

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In 1806, John Carr, the English traveller, claimed that: 'In the county of Meath, which borders upon the metropolis, it has been said that a justice of the peace must understand Irish, or keep an interpreter'.¹¹ The fact that it was deemed necessary to employ Irish-language interpreters in the county Assizes Courts until at least 1826 lends weight to Carr's claim. Records relating to the Meath Grand Jury Queries and Presentments between 1760 and 1830 demonstrate that court interpreters were employed on a continuous basis. The last recorded payment of £4.12s.4d was made to John Bowles at the Lent Assizes of 1826.¹² Further evidence that Irish was widely spoken in Meath is attested by the fact that the Irish Society launched a campaign prior to the Famine to distribute Irish-language bibles throughout the county.¹³

In 1806, the physician and polymath, Whitley Stokes (1763–1845), published a pamphlet entitled *The necessity of publishing the scriptures in Irish* claiming: 'in Louth, Meath and Westmeath, Irish is mostly spoken'.¹⁴ Six years later the English philanthropist and land agent, Edward Wakefield (1774–1854), in his two-volume survey of the Irish rural economy, claimed that the language was 'universally spoken' in Meath.¹⁵ Evidence of the spoken language can also be gleaned from the parochial surveys of Ardraccan and Syddan published by William Shaw Mason between 1814 and 1819. In Ardraccan, information was furnished by the Rev. Richard Moore, rector, and the Rev. Thomas Toomy, curate: 'the language generally spoken is the Irish, or rather a jargon compounded of Irish, English, and perhaps Welch and Saxon'.¹⁶ The Rev. Brabazon Disney stated that the majority of parishioners in Syddan were bilingual: 'The language used by the people in addressing each other is Irish, but there are very few who do not speak English well'.¹⁷ Christopher Anderson (1782–1852), the Scottish theological writer and Baptist preacher, published two works on the necessity for teaching the scriptures through the Irish language. One of those works, *Historical Sketches of the ancient native Irish* (1828), corroborated Thompson's *Statistical Survey*.¹⁸ John O'Donovan (1806–61), during the course of his fieldwork for the Ordnance Survey wrote from Navan on 15 August 1836: 'The Scotie language has totally disappeared in the S. west angle of East Meath where it joins Kildare, the King's county and Westmeath, and the ancient traditions are entirely forgotten [...]'.¹⁹ His statement is borne out by the census returns for this area of Meath from 1851.

The Census Returns of 1851 and 1891 provide a final important source for the survival of Irish. According to the 1851 census, the Irish-speaking communities were located in the northern and north-west baronies, especially in Fore, Kells, Navan and Slane, and spoken Irish was in steep decline in the south of the county.²⁰ A total of 8,963 Irish speakers were recorded, or 6.4 per cent of the population, but by the 1891 census, the Irish speaking population had declined to 1,482, a drop of over 80 per cent.²¹

*Lesá Ní Mhunghaile***Table 1: Distribution of Irish-language speakers by barony according to 1851 and 1891 census returns²²**

		1851			1891	
BARONY	Irish only	Total No. of Irish Speakers	% of pop. Irish Speaking	Irish only	Total No. Irish Speakers	% of pop. Irish Speaking
Deece, Lr.	–	37	1.1	–	15	0.9
Deece, Up.	–	6	0.2	–	12	0.6
Drogheda	–	75	4.8	Not in 1891 Census		
Duleek, Lr.	1	157	1.8	–	85	1.3
Duleek, Up.	–	71	1.3	–	17	0.6
Dunboyne	–	25	1.0	–	11	0.7
Fore	–	1,577	14.3	–	301	5.1
Kells, Lr.	–	698	7.8	–	207	4.0
Kells, Up.	5	1,502	9.3	–	337	4.0
Lune	–	808	8.4	–	43	0.8
Morgallion	1	609	8.3	–	120	3.4
Moyfenrath, Lr.	–	96	0.9	–	13	0.2
Moyfenrath, Up.	–	9	0.1	–	7	0.2
Navan, Lr.	–	911	7.3	–	90	1.2
Navan, Up.	–	152	3.6	–	17	0.7
Rathoath	–	183	3.4	–	25	0.9
Skreen	–	231	3.2	–	18	0.4
Slane, Lr.	–	1,041	15.8	–	115	1.3
Slane, Up.	–	775	10.8	–	59	1.5
MEATH COUNTY	7	8,963	6.4	–	1,492	1.9

A more in-depth study of the 1851, 1861 and 1881 census returns by Garret FitzGerald, focusing on decennial age-group tables, aimed to establish an approximate minimum level of Irish speaking in respect of successive new generations of young people born in Ireland between 1771 and 1871.²³ FitzGerald noted the high level of Irish speaking in much of the South-Ulster/North-Leinster region among the younger generation in the 1770s: 'It was in excess of 40% throughout this area, and reached levels between 60% and 80% in an inner core area running from northern Westmeath and southern Cavan through north Meath and south Monaghan to north Louth, the highest level being attained in Monaghan'.²⁴ Even allowing for the data to understate the speaking of Irish, he pointed to 'the remarkable speed with which Irish disappeared, so far as the younger generation were concerned, from most of this area during the first half of the nineteenth century' (Table 1, fig. 20.1).²⁵ FitzGerald's estimates support

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the evidence of John O'Donovan, that the language had been weakest in the baronies of Lower Moyfenrath and Deece from the 1770s onwards. The cohort born in these baronies during the decade 1811-21 may have been the first to comprise of an absolute minimum of Irish speakers. The greatest concentration of speakers born in this decade was located in the baronies of Fore, Kells Upper and Lower, Lune, Morgallion and Lower Slane. By the decade 1821-31, the percentage had almost halved in the aforementioned baronies. Among the cohort born during the decade 1831-41, the highest level, 10 per cent, was based in Kells Upper. This was followed by 9 per cent in Fore and 8 per cent in Kells Lower. The decline throughout the county continued at a rapid rate during successive decades so that by 1861-71 there were no native Irish speakers among the cohort born in sixteen of the eighteen baronies. In the two remaining baronies, Fore and Kells Upper, only one per cent of the cohort born were native speakers.

Table 2: Estimated minimum level (%) of Irish-speaking by barony among successive decennial cohorts, born 1771-1871²⁶

BARONY	1771-81	1781-91	1791-1801	1801-11	1811-21	1821-31	1831-41	1841-51	1851-61	1861-71
Deece, Lr.	9%	8%	8%	7%	6%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Deece, Up.	3%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Duleek, Lr.	42%	40%	30%	20%	12%	4%	1%	1%	0%	0%
Duleek, Up.	6%	6%	3%	2%	3%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%
Dunboyne	7%	5%	5%	3%	2%	2%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Fore	70%	70%	65%	61%	41%	22%	9%	4%	1%	1%
Kells, Lr.	70%	70%	64%	60%	40%	20%	8%	4%	1%	0%
Kells, Up.	64%	63%	61%	51%	35%	19%	10%	3%	2%	1%
Lune	37%	33%	24%	16%	10%	6%	2%	1%	0%	0%
Morgallion	71%	65%	60%	53%	32%	20%	5%	2%	1%	0%
Moyfenrath, Lr.	7%	4%	3%	1%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Moyfenrath, Up.	2%	2%	2%	2%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Navan, Lr.	50%	44%	32%	21%	13%	9%	3%	1%	1%	0%
Navan, Up.	30%	26%	21%	14%	11%	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Rathoath	30%	15%	10%	5%	6%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Skreen	23%	15%	12%	6%	3%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Slane, Lr.	65%	67%	61%	51%	42%	20%	6%	1%	1%	0%
Slane, Up.	58%	55%	49%	42%	21%	7%	3%	1%	0%	0%

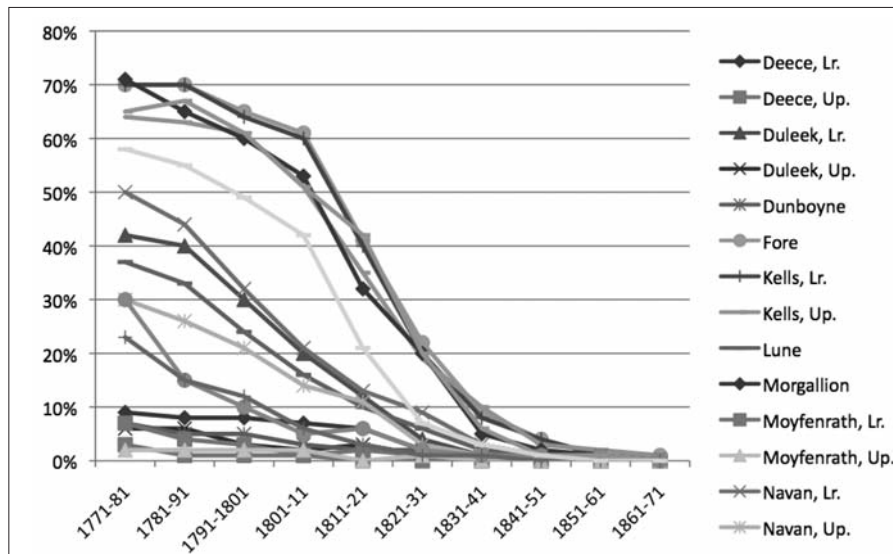
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Fig. 20.1: Estimated minimum level (%) of Irish-speaking by barony among successive decennial cohorts, born 1771-1871.

Eoghan Ó Gramhnaigh (Eugene O'Growney) (1863-99) noted in 1897 that in his native district of Athboy: 'Out of the fifteen people who in 1880 could speak Irish, thirteen are now dead'.²⁷ Although not born a native Irish-speaker, Ó Gramhnaigh learned Irish from a number of local native speakers that included Nannie Shiels.²⁸ Maighréad Uí Conmhidhe suggested that those speakers came from Kilskeer and she had also been told that Ó Gramhnaigh often spent time in the house of an old woman in Dunderry, who was a native speaker.²⁹ Returning to the subject years later, Uí Conmhidhe noted that as a boy, Ó Gramhnaigh visited his mother's family, the Smyth's of Johnstown, Kilskeer, regularly and that in the neighbouring townland of Liskevin there were a number of middle-aged native Irish speakers.³⁰ Jimmy King of Johnstown, Kilskeer, who was around 101 years old when he taught Ó Gramhnaigh Irish, is believed to have been one of the last native speakers in the area.³¹ The reminiscences of B. O'Higgins provide an insight into how the language began to die out in the locality during the mid-nineteenth century. He recounted how his maternal grandmother, who was from Kilskeer, 'spoke Irish better than English, understood it better, said her prayers in it always, but spoke broken English to her children'. As a result, his mother, who grew up in the years after the Great Famine, was not a native Irish speaker.³² Rev. Henry Gerrard of Gibbstown House related how Irish was spoken between the estate workers from Bohermeen and men from Munster, who had come to his father's house to buy horses in 1884.³³ In north Meath, bordering Monaghan and Louth, native speakers were

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still alive until 1910 and possibly later. Although they no longer spoke Irish on a daily basis, they used many Irish words, prayers and proverbs.³⁴ The Irish-language scholar, Seosamh Laoide (1865-1939), collected material from the native speakers Brian Mac Seathfraidh (Brian Shaffery) from Moynalty and Peter MacDonagh of Somerville, south of Slane, in preparation for his collection of songs and poems from Meath, *Duanaire na Midhe*, published in 1914.³⁵ The last native speakers in the county are believed to have lived until the 1930s.³⁶ Piatt claimed in 1933 that in the north of the county: 'Irish lived vigorously until very recently' and that 'Irish speakers were alive in fairly large numbers to within the last ten or fifteen years, the only other part of the Meath-Leinster area where any such thing was the case being Co. Kilkenny, - and even here, not as strong as Meath'.³⁷

Piatt collected phrases from a number of those Irish speakers, amongst whom was Séamas 'ac Aogáin of Churchtown, near Robertstown, Trim, who died in 1929. According to Piatt, Mac Aogáin's father, who was also a native speaker, died in 1907.³⁸ Another of the remaining speakers interviewed by Piatt was Tomás Mac Eochagáin of Potail Riach (Virginia Rd), close to the Cavan border, who had been brought up by his grandmother after his mother's death. As a result, the decline skipped a generation.³⁹ In 1942 Piatt was informed by Donegal settlers in Gibbstown of Eoghan Ó Tóchair, a native of the adjoining townland of Donaghpatrick, who had lived until the 1930s and whose Meath dialect was reported to have been very similar to that spoken in Donegal.⁴⁰

Eighteenth-century Gaelic manuscript tradition

Irish-language manuscript production took place throughout the county during the course of the eighteenth century. These codices were written by literate men who were teachers, farmers, labourers and priests, either for their own use or that of their patrons. They copied a variety of texts that pertained to the different Gaelic prose and poetry genres from both older and more recent manuscripts in circulation in their locality. Some of the codices were miscellanies containing a mixture of prose and poetry, others contain genealogies, while some contain devotional texts only. Medical texts do not appear to have been in circulation as they were in other parts of the country. The same texts often recur in different manuscripts and this gives an indication of their popularity. Among such texts are Fenian lays, the poem 'An Bás agus an Clárineach' believed to be a Meath composition, the poetry of Séamus Mac Cuarta and religious texts such as 'Beatha Chríost'. Manuscripts were copied for a variety of reasons such as the desire to preserve ancient texts, to own a compendium of specially chosen texts or to provide texts for the purpose of entertainment as material was often read aloud from manuscripts to the unlettered. There appears to be a strong correlation between the production of manuscripts and areas where spoken Irish

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survived into the nineteenth century. As indicated in the table and graph above, the language survived longest in the baronies Fore, Kells Upper and Lower and Morgallion and it was in these baronies that the written Gaelic tradition also persisted longest.

A number of scribes were active around Stackallen, Skreen, Rathoath during the early decades of the eighteenth century. Amongst the earliest extant manuscripts compiled in Meath from that century is part of BL Eg. 170, which was written in 1705 by Séamus Bhíetí (James Betagh) of Killeen, Skreen. It contains copies of romantic tales in addition to 'Agallamh an anma agus an chuirp re cheile' (Dialogue between the body and soul), a translation of the famous medieval Latin poem 'Dialogus inter Corpus et Animam'.⁴¹ Bhietí was an associate of the scribe Anraí Mac Murcheartaigh (Henry Murtagh), also from Killeen, and his name features in a draft of a bond in English in Bhíetí's manuscript. Only one manuscript in Mac Murcheartaigh's hand, NLI G 411, which he transcribed 'rena fhear cumain agus a chairdeas Chríod' (for his dear friend and godfather) Seon Ó Luinsigh between 1724-25, is still extant. Bhíetí's compilation, BL Eg. 170, contains a copy of the poem 'A Ghearoid na deana fanoid fa mo dhail le manoi', a poem composed for a Meath poet, Gearóid Mac na Midhe. Little is known about Mac na Midhe and it is unclear where he hailed from in Meath but it seems that he was living in Dublin in 1718.⁴² While there he came into contact with a literary network, the focal point of which was the home of Tadhg Ó Neachtain (c. 1671-1749) and his father, the scribe and poet Seán Ó Neachtain, in the Dublin Liberties.⁴³ Mac na Midhe was mentioned in a poem composed by the Dublin scribe, Tadhg Ó Neachtain, sometime between 1726-28, entitled 'Sloinnfead scothadh na Gaoidhilge grinn' (I shall name the best scholars of the keen Irish language). In it Tadhg listed twenty-six literary men known to him in the city, their special interests, skills and county of origin.⁴⁴ He described Mac na Midhe as follows: 'Gearóid díoghruis ón Mhidhe mhóir,/Mac na Midhe, mear an coinneoir,/s an deallrach Gaoidhiolgadh chríche Cuinn', (Earnest Gerard from the great province of Meath,/a swift learner and a shining Irish scholar from the north).⁴⁵ Ó Neachtain's poem praised another literary man from Meath, Seán Ó Baotháin (John Behan) from the Hill of Tara, in the following manner:⁴⁶

Ó Baothán binn, an béarlach suairc,
A thulach Teamhrach do ro-ghluais;
bhus saoi an Seán, bhus uasal méin,
Mac an Bheathadh a chraobh ceinéil

(Sweet Ó Baotháin, the witty speaker came from the hill of Tara.
Seán is a sage of noble aspect and he is descended from the Mac an Bheatha family).

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A third Meathman, Seon Mac Solaidh (Sean Mac Solly) from Harmanstown, Stackallen, is mentioned by Ó Neachtain and he is the most important scribe of the period in Meath.⁴⁷ Little is known of his personal life apart from his genealogy, which he provided in one of those manuscripts as ‘Seón mac Emuind mic Donnchdhaa mic Muiris Mic Solaidh’.⁴⁸ He was an extremely prolific scribe who transcribed approximately thirty manuscripts between 1713 and 1724, many of which provide evidence of manuscript interchange between Meath and Dublin through the Ó Neachtain network.⁴⁹ Tadhg Ó Neachtain referred to him in the following laudatory manner:

An Solamh sochmadh, Seán na searc,
A Thoigh Calláin thaoibhe Teamhrach,
cuim is sciath is tearmon dil
fhritil ársaidh Mhacaibh Míleadh.⁵⁰

(Placid Solomon, beloved Seán from Callan beside Tara,
he is a protector, a shield and a sanctuary for the ancient language of the
sons of Milesius).

Mac Solaidh appears to have belonged to an inner circle within the Ó Neachtain network, comprising six other scribes. These men worked in close co-operation with one another in their transcription and translation of genealogies and religious and historical texts, exchanging manuscripts and often using the same exemplar. In some instances, the handwriting of a number of these scribes appears in the same manuscript. Many of Mac Solaidh's manuscripts contain genealogies, amongst which are the genealogies of the Plunkett family of Meath, including that of Blessed Oliver Plunkett.⁵¹ He also made a number of fair copies of Sean Ó Neachtain's literary compositions such as *Stair Éamuinn Uí Chléirigh*, *An Gleacuidhe Géaglonnach*, *Imtheachta Cúigir* and *Jacobides et Carina*. Mac Solaidh appears to have collaborated most closely with Risteard Tiobar (Richard Tipper) who was from Mitchellstown, on the Meath/Dublin border. Of the corpus of Mac Solaidh manuscripts extant, at least four were written for Tiobar, while a number of others were either compiled in collaboration with him or were corrected and/or amended by the Fingal scribe.⁵² There is evidence that manuscripts passed between the men on a regular basis in 1718. A letter from Mac Solaidh to Tiobar, dated 28 January of that year is still extant in which Mac Solaidh indicated that he had loaned a medical manuscript to Tiobar and thanked him for the return of one of his own manuscripts.⁵³ He also requested copies of other material and he asked Tiobar to remind Gearóid Mac na Midhe and the Longford scribe Séamas Ó Fearghail (James O'Farrell), who was also mentioned in Ó Neachtain's poem, that he was 'waiting for all they promised me' ('innis dóibh gur fada liom go bfaicim gach ar gheall siad dhamh').⁵⁴

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Six of the extant codices penned by Mac Solaidh contain pious material. This reflects a similar trend in the manuscripts compiled by members of the Ó Neachtain circle, a large proportion of which were of a devotional nature, incorporating prayers, psalms, sermons and catechisms as well as hagiographical material. In 1714 Mac Solaidh copied from Proinsias Ó Maolmhuaidh's *Lucerna Fidelium or Lochrann na gcreidmheach* (Rome, 1676) and inserted the corresponding pagination of the book in the margins. The text was then corrected and amended by Tadhg Ó Neachtain.⁵⁵ It appears that he owned a printed copy of Aodh Mac Aingil's *Scáthán Shacramuinte na hAithridhe* (Louvain, 1618) and it may have served as his exemplar for a copy of the text in his hand which later came into the possession of Muiris Ó Gormáin.⁵⁶ He also transcribed various saints' lives and pious texts popular in the manuscript tradition as, for example, *Fís Mherlino* (The Vision of Merlino Maligne), a late vision tale telling how the robber Merlino Maligno in Bohemia saw a vision of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise and converted from his evil ways.⁵⁷ The manuscript NLI G229 contains his transcription of Seán Ó Neachtain's translation of *La Vera Sapienza* (An Eagna Fhíor), in addition to Seán Ó Dubhlaoidh's unpublished sermon *Seanmóir Aoine an Chéasda*. Furthermore, it contains prayers for various occasions such as waking in the morning, dressing and washing one's hands and face.⁵⁸ Mac Solaidh also transcribed manuscripts containing devotional material for his friends. One of these was the seventeenth-century poem *Beatha Chríost* (a life of Christ) composed in Munster and based on the Irish-language version of *Meditationes vitae Christi* (*Smaointe Beatha Chríost*), which he penned for his friend Semus Belle in 1720.⁵⁹ Around the same time he transcribed another copy of the life, in a manuscript containing religious verse in Irish, for his friend Domhnall Ó Maolriain, who he termed 'Ardollamh Éireann' in a scribal colophon.⁶⁰ He continued the colophon as follows: 'do réir mar a thaisbeanas sé faoi laimh gach aoín inna leabhair' (as he [Ó Maolriain] demonstrates in each of his books). Practically nothing is known of Ó Maolriain but he appears to have been from Meath and was clearly held in high esteem by his contemporaries as the poets Séamas Dall Mac Cuarta (c.1647-1733), Brian Ó Ceallaigh and the Breifne scribe Séamus Mág Uidhir each composed short poems in his honour. There are no manuscripts extant in Ó Maolriain's hand and if he composed poetry, none of his compositions have survived.⁶¹

The manuscript RIA 23 C 1, a copy of Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, was transcribed in Taafé's Town, Donaghpatrick, in 1719 by Mícheál Ó Hairt. This was one of the most regularly transcribed texts by scribes throughout Ireland during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and it was of interest to another key figure in the Meath-Dublin network, Anthony Raymond, Protestant vicar of Trim from 1705 until his death in 1726.⁶² Raymond belonged to the intimate circle of friends of Jonathan Swift, who was a regular visitor at his home

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in Trim, and he was closely associated with Tadhg Ó Neachtain and a number of other scholars in the Ó Neachtain network. He had planned to publish an English translation of Keating's text but was thwarted by the publication of Dermo'd O'Connor's translation published in 1723. A native of Munster, Raymond studied in Trinity College Dublin and after his transfer to Trim he found it necessary to learn Irish in order to administer effectively to his parishioners. He also learned to read the language, possibly with the assistance of Tadhg Ó Neachtain.⁶³ It is probable that he had contact with the Irish language during his youth in Munster and this may have sparked his initial interest in it and its antiquities. He may also have been influenced by the growing interest in Irish antiquities and history among Protestant scholars that had begun in the seventeenth century with the Irish manuscript collections of men such as James Ussher (1581-1656), James Ware (1594-1666), Narcissus Marsh (1638-1713) and William King (1650-1729). This curiosity was motivated by both an interest in original documents and also, during the early decades of the eighteenth century, the desire to give the Protestant community in Ireland 'a rooted and continuous Irish past' in an attempt to consolidate power after the Williamite War.⁶⁴ Raymond had planned to publish several works including a history of Ireland based on a study of Irish-language sources, a comparative study of the Germanic and Celtic languages and an English translation of Keating's *Foras Feasa*, but these plans never came to fruition due to his premature death. He engaged a number of scribes from the Ó Neachtain circle to assist him in transcribing and translating manuscripts. To this end, he borrowed a copy of the Book of Ballymote, compiled in the later fourteenth century, from the library of Trinity College Dublin around 1719, which he then loaned to Tadhg Ó Neachtain.⁶⁵ Raymond's literary activities and interest in the language provide an early example from the eighteenth century of the contact and co-operation that would develop between the Anglo-Irish and Gaelic cultures during the eighteenth century and would culminate in works such as Joseph Cooper Walker's *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards* (1786) and Charlotte Brooke's *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (1789) in the penultimate decade of the century.⁶⁶ Through their connection with Raymond, the scribes, in turn, made a significant contribution to contemporary antiquarian discourses concerning the Irish past by providing copies of annals, genealogies and law tracts.

Two further scribes flourished in the Stackallen area during the 1720s and 1730s. Although there is no evidence to suggest that they had contact with Mac Solaidh, it is difficult to imagine that they would not have been known to him. Only one codex produced by Éamonn Ó Raghallaigh (Edmond O'Reilly) between 1729-30, with additions made by Pádraig Ó Raghallaigh in 1735, is still extant.⁶⁷ The latter included the following colophon: 'Patriag O Riaghalle alaimh agus go bhfuil eagalle oram gurab e an lorg dheirenach shaicfior [?] mo

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pheanna na d[...] a tTeach Callann [...]' (Pádraig Ó Raghallaigh his hand, and I fear this is the last writing which will be seen [from] my pen or [...] in Stackallan [...]).⁶⁸ The current manuscript appears to be two separate manuscripts which were bound together. Both sections contain copies of *Beatha Chríost* as well as other religious matter. The copy of the text in the second section suggests a connection with the scribe Proinsias Ó Raghallaigh, who was from either Cavan or Meath, as the text of *Beatha Chríost* closely matches a transcription of the same text completed by Proinsias in 1727.⁶⁹ Furthermore, it is possible that Pádraig Ó Raghallaigh was the same scribe as that of RIA 24 P 42, penned in 1722, which also contains a copy of *Beatha Chríost* and appears to bear a relationship to the copy made by Proinsias five years later. De Brún has suggested that either Proinsias's copy derived from the Stackallen copy or both derived independently from the same exemplar.⁷⁰ The fact that a Munster text was being copied in Meath is of interest and points to its popularity amongst scribes. In addition, it gives some insight into the dissemination of certain texts throughout the country.

Pádraig Ó Doibhlinn, the Dunshaughlin scribe, was also active during the 1720s and two manuscripts in his hand are still extant.⁷¹ Among the various tales contained in the first, BL Eg. 164, written in 1726, are copies of the pseudo-Ossianic lay 'Suirghe Guill' and the romance *Jacobides and Carina*, both of which were composed by Seán Ó Neachtain. The latter text was an allegorical story featuring the Jacobite hero, James FitzJames, Duke of Berwick, probably composed around 1707. Both of these texts were very popular with members of the Ó Neachtain coterie, who transcribed numerous copies, some of which were corrected by Seán. Given his proximity to Dublin, Ó Doibhlinn may have had direct contact with members of the circle, or at the very least was able to gain access to their manuscripts. The second codex extant, BL Eg. 174, is a miscellaneous collection of poetry and prose which was compiled for Conn O'Neill of Ballymascanlon, County Louth.⁷²

By the mid-eighteenth century, scribal activity was still taking place in south Meath. Báitéar Ó Heisleannáin (Wat Heslin) transcribed two manuscripts in the Curragha area near Ratoath during the period 1758-60. The first one was penned between 1758-9 and contains Ossianic poetry, a copy of *Fís Merlino* and various religious poems, while the second, RIA 23 I 23, copied during 1758 and 1759, consists of material from the Meath-Louth school of poetry such as the compositions of Séamas Mac Cuarta.⁷³ Séamus Ó Mórdha has suggested that Ó Heisleannáin was the son of Cathal Ó Heisleannáin mentioned in Tadhg Ó Neachtain's poem on the literary men known to him in Dublin, and that the family were of Leitrim origin.⁷⁴ He was described by Ó Neachtain as follows: 'S Heisleannáin ághbhar oirdheirc' (illustrious Cathal Ó hÍsleanáin). According to Edward O'Reilly, Cathal was the author of a number of poems, one of which,

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addressed to Torlogh O'Donnell on his coming to Dublin, has been preserved in a manuscript by Risteard Tiobar.⁷⁵ Báitéar also owned a manuscript copy of *Scathán Shacramuinte na hAithridhe*, which he had inherited from his grandfather, Donnchadh Ó Heisleannáin.⁷⁶ Ó Heisleannáin was an associate of Maitiú Mac Síomóin (Mathew Fitzsimons), also from the Curragha, who provided the English translation of one of the most popular poems in the Gaelic manuscript tradition, 'Triúir atá ag brath ar mo bhás' (Three foes I have impatient for my death), contained in the Royal Irish Academy manuscript. This is a witty poem on death that was printed in O'Molloy's *Grammatica Latino-Hibernica* (Rome, 1677).⁷⁷ Nothing is known of Mac Síomóin but he may also have been a scribe. A further literary man connected to Ó Heisleannáin is Proinsias Mac an Ultaigh (Francis Nulty), who transcribed two items in the former's manuscript, RIA 23 I 23. There is a possibility that Proinsias and a Séamus Mac an Ultaigh from Screen, who was the scribe of RIA 12 E 25 in 1772, were related as Proinsias made additions to the manuscript in 1774.⁷⁸ In 1765 Labhrás Mhac an Alladh (Laurence McNally) wrote RIA 23 K 24 in Ratoath. Mac an Alladh was also the scribe of BL Add. 34119 in the same year, which contains a copy of Seán Ó Neachtain's *Stair Éamuinn Uí Chléirigh* and various romances and Ossianic poems.

Further north in the county, during the 1780s the scribes Pilib Ó Casaide (Philip Cassidy) and Proinsias Ó Casaide (Francis Cassidy) were active in the Crossakiel, Kells, district when they made a number of additions to the manuscript Add. 40766, now held in the British Library.⁷⁹ The codex contains a collection of love poetry and historical poems relating to the Maguires, O'Reillys and other related families. It was compiled in the barony of Magherastephana, Co. Fermanagh, at the end of the seventeenth century, possibly for Lady Enniskillen, by a scribe attached to the Maguires, barons of Enniskillen. The Ó Casaide's ancestors had been physicians to the Maguires of Fermanagh and this may explain their interest in the manuscript.⁸⁰ By 1732, however, the codex was in Louvain but it appears to have returned to Ireland some time after that with the Dominican friar Séamas Ó Muireadhaigh, who had spent time studying in the Dominican house there. Around 1756 it was in the Dominican house in Gabhla, Co. Fermanagh, owned by Seán Mhaguidhir. By 1784 it was in Meath in the possession of Pilib and it appears to have passed to Proinsias the following year.⁸¹ A Philip Cassidy, aged 62, is listed in the 1821 census as living in the parish of Lurgan, Co. Cavan, and he may have been the scribe of a manuscript transcribed between 1777-8 in which the scribe gave his genealogy as 'Philip mhc Proinsias mc Oiluin mhc Philip bhuídh mhc Néill Ruaidh Uí Chaiside'.⁸² The name Francis Cassidy was listed in the same census as an itinerant schoolmaster, aged 56, also living in the same parish and it is likely that he was the Bible Society teacher who was a signatory of the Kingscourt

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resolutions of 5 September 1827.⁸³ Given that Crossakiel is only around two miles from Killallon, it is possible that the Cassidy's were known to Eoin Ó Muirreadh (Fr. John Murray), parish priest of Killallon (1784-1809), who was originally from Rathmoyle in the south of the county. He was the scribe of NLI G228, a substantial manuscript over 400 pages long, consisting primarily of religious material, in 1801.⁸⁴ By 1840 it had come into the possession of the Irish Society teacher John Galligan of Hartstown in the same parish.⁸⁵

Nineteenth-century Gaelic manuscript tradition

By the early decades of the nineteenth century scribal production was concentrated primarily in the northern half of Meath around Nobber, Moynalty and Kells. A strong Gaelic tradition already existed in this region in the preceding century and it was the birthplace of both the blind harper Turlough Carolan and the scholar and poet Pól Ó Briain, the first professor of Irish in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.⁸⁶ Most intriguing is a commonplace-book now held in the National Library of Scotland, MS. Adv. LS 72.2.7, dated Meath 1801, which was compiled by Patrick Turner when a corporal in the Argyll Fencibles. He signed the scribal colophon as follows: 'Sgriobhta le Paruig Tuarnair coirpleir ann an cath bhuidinn chois Earaghaedheal ann an Ce[an]n[anus Mór] Mhidhe san bhliaghna [] 1801') (Written by Patrick Turner, corporal in the Argyll infantry battalion in Kells, Meath in the year 1801). The script is mainly in the Roman character, occasionally in the Gaelic, and it is noteworthy that the language of the texts varies from Scotticised transliteration of Irish to pure Scottish Gaelic.⁸⁷

Turner, who was evidently Scottish, was literate in both the Scottish Gaelic and Irish Gaelic languages. He later stated in an affidavit that the manuscript was 'transcribed from a manuscript in the possession of a Schoolmaster ten or twelve miles west of Kells in the county of Meath' and that 'the manuscript from which it was copied was in the Irish character'.⁸⁸ Another manuscript compiled in or near Kells in the first decade of the nineteenth century was NLI G664, transcribed by 'Michael Mhac Domhnaill a Ceannanuis na Mee' in 1806 and 1817. This manuscript contains copies of prayers and it later came into the possession of Eoghan Ó Gramhnaigh, who included his signature on it in 1880.

The transcription work of the schoolmaster and scribe, Sylvester Gibney (Silbhestar Mhac Gibne), who was active during the first half of the nineteenth century, provides an interesting example of a scribe who moved between Meath and Cavan, thus allowing for dissemination of texts and manuscripts within a wider region. He wrote FLK A40 during the period 1812-23, some of which time at least he spent as a schoolmaster at Balrath.⁸⁹ He also transcribed material for John Nicholson of Balrath House.⁹⁰ By the 1840s he appears to have been living in Co. Cavan where he transcribed Cambridge University Library, Add. 6561 between 1847-8.⁹¹

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The scribal tradition continued in the neighbouring Ratoath/Dunshaughlin area until at least the 1820s when Eoin Ó Fionnagáin from Culmullin, Dunshaughlin, transcribed poems from Brooke's *Reliques of Irish Poetry* in addition to other miscellaneous verse. Much of this manuscript is based on the works of Seán Ó Neachtain. This points to the continued popularity of Ó Neachtain's compositions in the Meath manuscript tradition. In addition, two transcripts in Ó Fionnagáin's collection are closely related to copies of the same texts in RIA 23 C 28 written by John Leo Nicolas and J.J. Nicolas (Séamus Niclais) in Crosskeys in 1818, which suggests that the latter manuscript may have served as an exemplar for Ó Fionnagáin's transcript. Although the place name Crosskeys occurs in a number of counties, there is a townland called Crosskeys in close proximity to Culmullin and given the relationship between the manuscripts, it is possible that the Nicolas's were from Meath.

The Irish language continued its decline during this period and the early decades of the century marked a transitional phase that witnessed the change from composition in Irish only to Irish and English (macaronic verse) and finally to English only.⁹² By the 1840s, according to FitzGerald's extrapolations from census data, only 4 per cent of the cohort born in that decade in Kells Lower and Fore respectively were Irish speakers, while the percentage was just 2 per cent in Morgallion. The total number of Irish speakers recorded in the 1851 census for those baronies was 698, 1,577 and 609 respectively. The transition from composing in Irish to English can be traced through the work of a number of poets active in the area: cousins Michael (1750-1847) and Bryan Clarke (Ó Cléirigh) and Peter Coalrake from Nobber, Mathew Monaghan of Mullagh, James Tevlin of Billywood, Moynalty, and William Walsh.⁹³ Manuscript evidence suggests regular contact between these men and they also had regular contact with scholars and scribes outside the area.⁹⁴ Linked to this coterie were the scribes Peadar Ó Gealacháin from Ardamagh and Pádraig Ó Raghallaigh (Patrick Reilly) of Robertstown, Kilbeg parish.⁹⁵ Ó Gealacháin was a prolific scribe and at least twenty-five manuscripts in his hand are still extant, the most substantial, and possibly most important of which, is a codex now held in the University of Edinburgh.⁹⁶ Not only is this manuscript an important repository for the poems and songs of the Louth/Meath area, it is also a key source for the works of the aforementioned poets and scribes. Indeed, in some cases it is the only source for their compositions and Ó Gealacháin's many colophons provide useful biographical information as well as a critical appraisal of their work. Like Ó Fionnagáin from Dunshaughlin, he also transcribed a substantial number of poems from Charlotte Brooke's *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, including her notes and English translations.⁹⁷ Three manuscripts penned by Ó Raghallaigh are still extant in addition to a verse translation in English attributed to him in Ó Gealacháin's Edinburgh manuscript. He was the scribe of UCD Gaelic Ms. 4

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(O'Curry); Edinburgh Ms. Gen. 1841/1 (1817-18); and NLI G 692 (1847), containing verse by the northern poets Peadar Ó Doirnín and Art Mac Cumhaigh. The scholar and Irish Society Teacher from Balrath, Semus Ó Rathailaigh (James Reilly), is connected to the second and third manuscripts. Pádraig transcribed NLI G 692 for Semus while the latter was living in Dublin, and his name and the date 1829 appears on pp. 117, 158-9 of the Edinburgh manuscript. Pádraig Ó Raghallaigh may have been the subject of a Bible Society report in October 1822 that stated that a certain Patrick Reilly was regarded as 'a good Irish scholar' and was also a piper.⁹⁸ He assisted John O'Donovan in his work for the Ordnance Survey.⁹⁹ A further literary figure, the poet, scribe and author of a philosophical text, Aodh Mac Domhnaill, was from Drumconrath but spent much of his life living in Antrim and Donegal. He was back living in Drumconrath for some of the 1820s, however, and Ó Gealacháin composed a lament on the death of his wife, Bridget Roe, in 1836: 'A chlann Jupiter na n-éacht tá bhur gcomhnaidhe i mbarr an tsléibhe'.

Apart from their cultivation of their native heritage, most of these literary men were connected to one another through their employment as teachers for the Protestant Bible Society, The Irish Society for Promoting the Education of the Native Irish through the Medium of their Own Language, established in 1818.¹⁰⁰ The majority of these men were further connected as subscribers to Michael Clarke's, *Man's Final End* (1824), a versified translation of the popular poem 'Críoch Díghionach an Duine', which deals with the Last Judgment. Periodic meetings of teachers took place in Kingscourt, Co. Cavan, and these gatherings provided a potential forum where manuscripts could be exchanged. For example, a manuscript transcribed in Youghal in 1826-7 connects two Munster Irish teachers, John (O') Daly and Labhrás Ó Séaghdha (Laurence Shea), with Michael Owens, an inspector sent by the Bible Society from Meath to Youghal in 1826.¹⁰¹ Owens may have returned with manuscript material to Meath because one of Ó Séaghdha's poems, in which the latter protested that he has not become a Protestant, appears in Ó Gealacháin's NLI G 200.¹⁰² In a section dated 1826-7 in Ó Gealacháin's Cambridge Ms. Add Ms 6563, he recorded material taken down from three Irish Society teachers: Philip Cassidy, whose house Ó Gealacháin had stayed in the previous year; an Ossianic lay that had been transcribed from a codex belonging to Patrick Magee; and Francis Farrelly from Tullypole, Moynalty.¹⁰³

Peadar Dubh Ó Dálaigh (Peter Daly, c. 1800-1861), who was born in Baile an tSléibhe (Mountainpole) north of the Hill of Lloyd, Kells was another Irish Society teacher linked to Ó Gealacháin. In 1824 he was living at 20 Capel Street in Dublin and was listed as a subscriber to Clarke's *Man's Final End*. By 1826, however, he had returned to Meath where he spent the remainder of his life, teaching in Bohermeen in Ardbracon parish, and Athboy.¹⁰⁴ He ran a Catholic school in Bohermeen, sometime before 1826, his advertisement for which read as follows:

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I'm teaching the young our Mother Tongue
 At least I may venture to mention
 I'm better than some who greedily thumb
 The Bible-Society Pension.

He clearly had a change of heart after this, however, as he converted to Protestantism, as did two of his sisters. He lost his post in Bohermeen as a result of the conversion but soon found employment as a teacher for the Kildare Place Society and later also became an inspector for the Irish Society. Whether his conversion was genuine or not is impossible to say, but he is believed to have reverted back to Catholicism at the end of his life. Like Pádraig Ó Raghallaigh, he assisted John O'Donovan's Ordinance Survey work in 1836 and it appears from a letter written by O'Donovan from Kells that he believed the schoolmaster would be of great assistance to his researches. However, given the fact that Ó Dálaigh had a large family to feed, O'Donovan would be 'very sorry that he would leave his house, School and potatoe [sic] fields for our uncertain speculations'.¹⁰⁵ Two manuscripts in Ó Dálaigh's hand are still extant.¹⁰⁶ The first, part two of RIA 24 P 31, was transcribed sometime after 1816 and contains copies of Ossianic and romance material in addition to the romantic poem composed by Seán Ó Neachtain, 'Laoidh Fhormaltais mhac Maolra'. The second, BL Eg. 208, is a substantial codex penned in 1826 and it served as an exemplar for a large number of poems contained in Ó Gealacháin's Edinburgh manuscript. It consists primarily of poetry of the Louth and Meath district and prose stories such as 'Oidhe Chlainne Lir', 'Oidhe Chlainne Tuirinn' and 'Inneirghe Mhic na Míchomhairle', in addition to a number of Irish translations of English poems. Ó Dálaigh was a collector of manuscripts as he came into possession of one written in 1759 by the prolific Co. Louth scribe Pádraig Ó Pronntaigh.¹⁰⁷ It is likely that it was of particular interest to Ó Dálaigh as it contains the poetry of Counties Louth and Armagh. He evidently had access to other manuscripts also, as a colophon in Eg. 208 states that he transcribed 'Tuireamh Eoghain Rúadh Ó Néill' from a copy completed by Muiris Ó Gormáin in March 1762.¹⁰⁸

Ó Dálaigh composed a number of poems in Irish and in English and these enjoyed popularity locally, particularly at wakes. In one, clearly composed before he took up employment with the Society, he condemned Catholic teachers for teaching on behalf of the Kildare Place Society: 'Chum na Maighisterugh Gaedhlic atá faoi phrioccadoirigh fallsa Shráid Chilldara agus do dhiult comhairle an Easpag Catolice mar gheall ar bhrib' (To the Gaelic masters who are under the false tempters of Kildare Street and who rejected the advice of the Catholic bishop for the sake of a bribe), beginning as follows: 'A Mhaighistrí Gaedhlic a gheillios do Sacsanaigh'. Unlike the other Meath scribes, he succeeded in having some of his material published. His initials are appended to thirteen of the hymns

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translated in *Cláirseach Naomhtha na hÉireann* (1835), published by Mary Jane Alexander (M.I. Alasdruin) (1799-1874), daughter of the Protestant bishop of Meath who lived in Ardbraccan House. He also contributed a verse in Irish, titled 'Tá Súil Dé – Ort. Glac Rabhadh' (The eye of God is on you. Be warned), to Alexander's *Cara an Pheacaidhe*, a translation of John Vine Hall's *The Sinner's Friend* (1837) two years later.¹⁰⁹ Two publications also appeared under his own name: in 1839 he published a pamphlet in Trim entitled 'Letter to the Rev. Mr. Callary' in which he explained his reasons for converting to Protestantism; this was followed two years later by *Teagasc Críostuighe an Fhíorcreidmheach ag taisbeanadh Príomh Erraidibh Eaglais na Róimhe* (1841), a translation of *Protestant Catechism: shewing the principal errors of the Church of Rome*.

Peadar Ó Gealacáin, Aodh Mac Domhnaill and another Irish Society teacher, Seán Ó Duinn (John Dunne) of Monknewtown, Slane, also served as a link between the Meath Gaelic literary tradition and the wider context of Protestant antiquarian investigations during the nineteenth century as they assisted the researches of the Belfast scholar Roibeard Mac Ádhaimh (Robert Shipboy Mac Adam) (1808-95). Mac Domhnaill spent the period 1842 until 1856 travelling the country, transcribing and collecting material for Mac Ádhaimh. He was responsible for recruiting Ó Gealacáin, who spent four months in Belfast in 1844 transcribing for Mac Ádhaimh, and continued the work on his return to Meath. Seán Ó Duinn was seventy years of age when he was brought to the attention of Mac Ádhaimh in 1843 by a Michael Levins, who informed the antiquarian that Ó Duinn had a copy of Keating's *Foras Feasa* that he might be induced to sell, in addition to having 'copies of several poems, songs and Irish herbal cures'.¹¹⁰ He was the scribe of part of RIA 23 O 54, compiled during 1827 and 1842-43.

Gaelic Poetic tradition

The compositions of a number of poets – either Meath-born or living in Meath - from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have come down to us thanks to their preservation in the manuscripts of Peadar Ó Gealacáin and the anthologies compiled by Seosamh Laoide and Énrí Ó Muirgheasa at the beginning of the twentieth century. Chief amongst those poets were Séamus Dall Mac Cuarta (c.1647–1733), Aodh Mac Domhnaill, Pól Ó Briain (1763-1820) of Moynalty and Uilliam Buí Ó Maol Chiaráin (William Kearns) (1700?-66) from Oristown. A number of minor poets included Peter Coalrake from Whitewood, Naoise Mac Gabhann from Emlagh, Pádraig Ó Briain from Newgrange, Uilliam Ó Briain who may have been from Clare but lived in Rosnaree, the abovementioned Peadar Dubh Ó Dálaigh of Ardbraccan and Séamus Ó Toimhleáin (James Tevlin) (1798-1873) from Moynalty. A number of examples will suffice to give an indication of the important insights they provide into social conditions in Meath. The period 1750-1840 witnessed a shift in agricultural pursuits to cattle farming

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and commercial tillage as well as a growth in the linen industry. Much of the county was dominated by large grazing farms and extensive landlord demesnes. Within these areas of sparsely populated parishes, however, there were pockets of dense population, often in bog land areas such as Oristown and Ardbacchan, where the roadsides were dotted with mud cabins.¹¹¹ Some of the above mentioned poets lived in such marginal areas – Uilliam Ó Maolchiaráin and Peadar Dubh Ó Dálaigh. In one of Ó Maol Chiaráin's poems, for example, he describes how his wife, a weaver, went to Ulster to buy 'tow', the cheapest part of scutched flax. In another, he laments his son's transportation for stealing wool. He was sent to Trim prison by Alexander Gardiner of Arch Hall in the parish of Clongill but it is not clear for what crime. In the poem he claims that if his friends knew of his plight they would come to liberate him as would his patron, O'Reilly of Milestown, Donaghpatrick. The hostility with which migrant harvest workers were viewed is the subject of a comic poem, 'Seoladh an Spailpín', composed by Peadar Ó Cúalraic (Peter Coalrake), which recounts the tale of a Monaghan labourer who is sent on a wild goose chase all over Ireland. Coalrake also became involved in the controversy surrounding attempts by the Kildare Street Society to teach the scriptures through the medium of Irish. The Nobber poet, Philip Thornton, composed a biting satire in English, entitled 'Teague Connellan and his volunteers', on the many Catholic schoolmasters who had offered their services to the Protestant Bible Society schools as a means of earning a living. In it, he attacked Taddaeus Connellan, a founding member of the Irish Society and a convert, who led the drive to proselytise the native Irish in their own tongue:

Teague Connellan first laid the plan, when he fail'd of holy orders
 From the Church of Christ he did recant with Luther-like disorders
 To London he set off with speed, to begin his machination,
 And set his engines those to work against his native nation.

A number of the schoolmasters and scribes depended on the bible schools for a living, much to the displeasure of the local Catholic clergy, and it is likely that Thornton was trying to curry favour with the local parish priest, Rev. John Halpin, by attacking those who assisted the efforts of the Society. The poem ends with a call on parents not to send their children to the Society's schools:

I recommend to every friend, especially to parents,
 To keep their children from the schools of Thady's vile adherents;
 Obey your Church & shun the lurch, condemn'd by all our pastors,
 Who criminate and reprobate, apostate Irish Masters.

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Coalrake chose to reply to Thornton's poem in Irish, calling Thornton 'traill gan léigheann/ Gan oideas, gan eolas, gan mheabhair, gan bhéasa' (a slave without learning/without education, knowledge, intelligence or manners). This indicates that Thornton must have been bilingual as Coalrake presumably expected Thornton to understand it.

The poet Pádraig Ó Briain from Newgrange composed the poem 'Tig ciamhaire ar mo chuimhne' on a war ship during his time in the British navy fighting in the Napoleonic wars. It appears that he had been press-ganged and the poem provides a vivid description of the poor conditions he endured in the navy:

Shaoil mé gur fanamhóid briathra gach seanóir
A bhéadh fiannaidheacht ar shamhail árus na bpian;
'S gur le fiabhrán do chanas le frithidheacht gan aithrighe
Ar gach taobh do na bealaigh a ngluaiseóchadh 'n srian.
In aimsir dúbhlacht' gan earradh, gúna bheith thorainn,
Lúbthaí ina hammóig – nidh nach ar mhian –
Imeasg brúidí gan árus, múchta in gach galar,
Dar mo chúbhais nidh nár b'ait é le Pádraig Mhac Briain.¹¹²

(I believed that the stories of the old soldiers were foolish
Exaggerated the image of the hospital.
And it is in a fit of temper that I sang in opposition without repentance,
On every side of the path that the rain goes.
In harsh winter weather without a military suit or cloak over us
Twisted in hammocks, a thing that is undesirable,
Amongst homeless brutes, smothered in every disease.
On my word of honour, it is not strange to Pádraig Mac Briain).

The Great Famine was the subject of three poems composed by Aodh Mac Domhnaill viz. 'Milleadh na bPrátaí' (Destruction of the potatoes), Agallamh idir Aindrias Ó hÉigearthaigh agus an Bard um Mheath na bPrátaí' (Contention between Aindrias Ó hÉigearthaigh and the bard about the decline of the potatoes) and 'Ceol na mBacach' (The Song of the Beggars).¹¹³ In 'Milleadh na bPrátaí', possibly composed in February 1846, Mac Domhnaill described the Famine's effects on the general population:

Níl fear i gcríoch Fáil ná mná is leinbh na cích',
Níl scafaire breá ná stáidbhean mhascalach mhín,
Níl bacach ar shráid ach cráite is torrach a chaoi,
Ó tháinig an phláigh ar phrátaí, is díomhaoin dubh díth.¹¹⁴

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(There is not a man in the land of Fáil, nor a woman nor child in the womb/ nor a strapping lad nor gentle comley maiden/nor a beggar on the street who is not tormented, full of sorrow is his lament/without employment, dark loss/Since the plague came on the potatoes).

Peadar Ó Gealacháin commentend on the calamity in a poem entitled ‘Laoi cascartha na bpotátaí’ (A poem on the potatoes’ destruction), in which he claimed that ‘ár saorbharr breá séanmhar’ (our noble, auspicious crop) was ‘i lámha an éaga’ (in death’s hands) and lamented that nothing could replace the potato: ‘Fíon Spáinneach, beoir ársa nó tea glan/Ní áirím gur sású sin d’aon neach’ (Spanish wine, mature beer or pure tea, I do not believe these satisfy any one).¹¹⁵

Although this chapter has only provided a broad overview, there is little doubt, based on the evidence offered here, that a thriving Irish-language manuscript and oral culture existed in Meath until at least the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The texts and individuals discussed demonstrate that the scribes and poets, who were active in the county during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were outward looking and engaged in contact and interchange with literary men in other parts of the country, particularly Dublin. Their literary productions provide an important insight, therefore, into an often overlooked aspect of Meath’s rich heritage which deserves wider acknowledgement. This literary tradition, along with the survival of spoken Irish in Meath well into the nineteenth century, offers a new perspective on the royal county.

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2. Énrí Ó Muirgheasa, *Ambráin na Midhe* (Baile Átha Cliath agus Corcaigh, 1933), p. 8. See also, my new edition of *Ambráin na Midhe* with English translations: Énrí Ó Muirgheasa, *Ambráin na Midhe*, ed. Lesa Ní Mhunghaile (forthcoming 2015).
3. *Ibid.*, 9.
4. N.J.A. Williams, ‘Na cantúintí a theacht chun solais’ in Kim McCone, Damian McManus et al (eds), *Stair na Gaeilge in ómós do Pádraig Ó Fiannachta* (Má Nuad, 1994), p. 467; idem, ‘Téacsanna foghrúla ó Chontae na Mí’ in *Studia Hibernica*, xxxi (2000-01), pp 277-91; Seosamh Laoide, ‘The Leinster dialect’ in *An Claidheamb Soluis*, xii, no. 40 (10/12/1910), p. 21; xii, no. 43 (31/12/1910) pp 5-6; xii, no. 48 (4/2/1911) pp 5-6; Donn Piatt, ‘Gaedhilg na Midhe’ in *An tUltach*, xiv, no. 7 (Aug. 1937), p. 5; idem, ‘Giotá de Ghaeilg dhúchasach na Midhe’ in *An tUltach*, xxix, no.6 (1952), pp 11-12; idem, ‘Gaeilge na Mí’ in *An tUltach*, xlv, no. 9 (1967), pp 9-10.
5. Donn Piatt, *Gaelic dialects of Leinster* (n.p., 1933), p. 5.
6. Seosamh Laoide, *Sgealaidhe Oirghiall .i. Sgealaidhe Fearnmhúighe agus tuilleadh leis* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1905), p. 123.
7. P. Branagan, ‘Kilskyre and district’ in *Ríocht na Midhe*, iv, no. 4 (1970), p. 70.
8. Williams, ‘Na cantúintí a theacht chun solais’, p. 471.
9. Éamonn Ó Tuathail, ‘A Meath phrase-list in Hugh McDonnell’s handwriting’ in *Éigse*, v (1945-7), pp 36-44; Breandán Ó Buachalla, ‘Muinn “we” in South East Ulster’ in *Éigse*, xiii (1969/70), pp 31-2. For an

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- example of these manuscripts, see Belfast Public Library Ms XVIII, which was probably compiled during the period 1840-1854 by Aodh Mac Domhnaill. For a detailed description of the Ó Gealacáin manuscripts, see Ciarán Dawson, *Peadar Ó Gealacáin. Scriobhaí* (Dublin, 1992).
10. Robert Thompson, *Statistical survey of the county of Meath: with observations on the means of improvement; drawn up for the consideration, and under the direction of the Dublin Society* (Dublin, 1802), pp 94-5.
 11. John Carr, *The stranger in Ireland: or, a tour in the southern and western parts of that country, in the year 1805* (Hartford, 1806), p. 197.
 12. John Brady, 'Irish Interpreters at Meath Assizes' in *Ríocht na Midhe*, ii (1959-62), p. 63.
 13. Seán de Fréine, *The great silence* (repr. Dublin, 1968), p. 64.
 14. Whitley Stokes, *The necessity of publishing the scriptures in Irish* (Dublin, 1806), p. 2.
 15. Wakefield, *An account of Ireland, statistical and political* (2 vols, London, 1812), ii, 778.
 16. William Shaw Mason, *A statistical account, or parochial survey of Ireland: drawn up from the communications of the clergy* (3 vols, Dublin, 1814-19), i, 95.
 17. Shaw Mason, *Statistical account*, iii, 391.
 18. Christopher Anderson, *Historical sketches of the ancient native Irish and their descendants* (Edinburgh, 1828), p. 155.
 19. Michael Herity (ed.), *Ordnance Survey letters County Meath* (Dublin, 2001), p. 80.
 20. Brian Ó Cuív, *Irish dialects and Irish-speaking districts* (repr. Dublin, 1980), p. 24.
 21. It should be noted that Drogheda was included in the 1851 census returns for Meath but was not included in the 1891 census returns.
 22. Ó Cuív, *Irish dialects and Irish-speaking districts*, p. 80.
 23. Garret FitzGerald, 'Estimates for baronies of minimum level of Irish-speaking amongst successive decennial cohorts, 1771-1781 to 1861-1871' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy C*, lxxxiv (1984), pp 117-55.
 24. FitzGerald, 'Estimates for baronies', p. 124.
 25. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
 26. These figures are based on Table 3, FitzGerald, 'Estimates for baronies', p. 131.
 27. Ó Cuív, *Irish dialects and Irish-speaking districts*, p. 27.
 28. Ó Casaide, 'The last Irish speakers of Leinster' in *Irish Book Lover* (March/April 1932), pp 41-2; Seán Ó Ceallaigh, *Eoghan Ó Gramhnaigh. Beathaisnéis* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1968), p. 13.
 29. Maighréad Uí Conmhíde, 'Gaeilg na Midhe' in *Ríocht na Midhe*, ii, no. 1 (1959), p. 61.
 30. Uí Conmhíde, *Meath. Towards a history* (Dublin, 2010), 206. See also, Branagan, 'Kilskyre and district', p. 70.
 31. Branagan, 'Kilskyre and district', p. 70.
 32. B. O'Higgins, 'My Songs and myself' in *Wolfe Tone Annual* (1949), 42.
 33. Uí Conmhíde, 'Gaeilg na Midhe', p. 61.
 34. Uí Conmhíde, 'Gaeilg na Midhe', p. 61.
 35. Seosamh Laoide, *Duanaire na Midhe* (BÁC, 1907), p. 121.
 36. See Piatt, 'Gaeilge na Mí', p. 9.
 37. Piatt, *Gaelic dialects of Leinster*, 8.
 38. *Ibid.*, 15.
 39. Piatt, 'Giotá de Ghaeilg dhuchasach na Midhe' in *An tUlach*, xxix, no. 6 (1952), p. 11; idem, 'Gaedhilg na Midhe', p. 5.
 40. Piatt, 'Gaeilge na Mí', p. 9.
 41. This manuscript later came into the possession of the Dublin scribe Risteard Tipper, who continued to copy texts into it, as for example, the romantic tale 'Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair' and *Eachtra Abhlaicche*, a later form of the tale *Tochmarc Fhearbhlaidhe*.
 42. He appears to have been 'a well-known satirist' but only one verse of his, contained in BL Eg. 161, in reply to an old man about to marry a young woman who he had mocked, has survived. See, Standish Hayes O'Grady, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the British Library (formerly British Museum)* vol. 1 (London, 1926, repr. Dublin, 1992), p. 616. (Hereafter cited as *Cat. BM* i). See also, BL Eg. 170, f. 12b. See letter from Seon Mac Solaidh to Richard Tipper below.

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43. This was an extremely prolific group and in excess of one hundred manuscripts produced by fifteen individuals associated with it are still extant. For the Ó Neachtains see, May H. Risk, 'Seán Ó Neachtain: an eighteenth-century Irish writer' in *Studia Hibernica*, xv (1975), pp 47-60; Cathal G. Ó Háinle, 'Neighbors in eighteenth-century Dublin: Jonathan Swift and Seán Ó Neachtain' in *Éire-Ireland*, xxi (1986), pp 106-21; idem, 'A life in eighteenth-century Dublin: Tadhg Ó Neachtain' in *Féile Zozimus*, i (1992), pp 10-28; Alan Harrison, *Ag cruinniú meala* (Dublin, 1988), passim; idem, *The Dean's friend. Anthony Raymond 1675-1726, Jonathan Swift and the Irish language* (Dublin, 1999), passim; Nessa Ní Shéaghdha, 'Irish scholars and scribes in eighteenth-century Dublin' in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland/Iris an dá chultúr*, iv (1989), pp 42-44; Breandán Ó Buachalla, 'Seacaibíteachas Thaidhg Uí Neachtain' in *Studia Hibernica*, xvi (1991-92), pp 31-64; idem, *Aisling Ghéar* (Dublin, 1996), passim; Liam Mac Mathúna, 'Getting to grips with innovation and genre diversification in the work of the Ó Neachtain circle in early eighteenth century Dublin' in *Eighteenth Century Ireland/Iris an dá chultúr*, xxvii (2012), pp 53-83.
44. The poem also lists the scribe Aodh Ó Cobhthaigh from Westmeath. It appears that he spent some time living in Meath as he penned part of Ms. Hyde 37, now held in the James Hardiman Library, NUI Galway, in Baile Risteárd (Richardstown), Co. Meath, in 1710.
45. Alan Harrison, *Ag Cruinniú meala* (Dublin, 1988), pp 136-7; idem, Harrison, *The Dean's friend*, p. 167. He was also the subject of a poem composed by the Franciscan friar Proinsias Doibhlin (Francis Devlin) entitled 'An tAthair Proinsias Ó Doimhléin do Ghearóid Mac Conmídhe', beginning 'Gach croicinn libh dár feannadh', in which the friar rebuked him for his sharp tongue. Flower, *BL Cat.* ii, p. 114; Éamonn Ó Tuathail, 'An t-Athair Proinsias Ó Doimhléin do Ghearóid Mac Conmídhe cct' in *Éigse*, i (1939), p. 79. Three copies of the poem are still extant in the following manuscripts: BL Eg. 118, NLI G 137 and Trinity College Dublin (TCD) H.4.15. Cuthbert Mhág Craith (ed.), *Dán na mBráthar Mionúr* (2 vols, Dublin, 1980), i, pp 295-6; ii, pp 268-71.
46. Ó Baotháin was probably a poet and a poetical letter in his hand is still extant in BL. Eg. 194. Robin Flower, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the British Library (formerly British Museum)* vol. 2 (London, 1926, repr. Dublin, 1992), p. 102. (Hereafter cited as *Cat. BL* ii). Two of his poems addressed to a Pól Céitinn, in Tadhg Ó Neachtain's hand, are found in TCD H.4.20, written between 1725 and 1729. Ó Neachtain's manuscript also contains a poem beginning 'Uí Bhaothain ionmhuin chuid mo chuim', which may have been a reply from Céitinn. See, T.K. Abbott and E.J. Gwynn, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the library of Trinity College Dublin* (Dublin, 1921), pp 192-199.
47. A Richard Macnamee later came into the possession of at least one manuscript transcribed by Mac Solaidh, and it is possible that he was related to the Gearóid Mac na Midhe mentioned above. See, BL Eg. 191, ff. 1, 14b, 203b.
48. RIA 23 K 37.
49. After Mac Solaidh's death some of his manuscripts came into the possession of the northern scribe Muiris Ó Gormáin, while others such as NLI G54 and G57 were eventually bought by the Gaelic scholar Edward O'Reilly, who had family connections in Meath. For a discussion of the manuscripts in Ó Gormáin's possession, see Lesa Ní Mhunghaile, 'An eighteenth-century Gaelic scribe's private library: Muiris Ó Gormáin's books' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy C*, cx (2010), pp. 239-76.
50. T.F. O'Rahilly, 'Irish scholars in Dublin in the early eighteenth century' in *Gadelica*, i (Dublin, 1912-13), pp 156-62; Harrison, *Ag cruinniú meala*, pp 135-37.
51. See, for example, RIA 23 M 17-18.
52. For example, RIA 23 D 6 (155), RIA 23 D 5 (156), BL Eg. 106, NLI G 65.
53. RIA 23 M 4. For a printed version of the letter, see Paul Walsh, *Gleanings from Irish manuscripts* 2nd edn. (Dublin, 1933), pp 197-204. See also Harrison, *The Dean's friend*, pp 48-9.
54. This material includes one of Geoffrey Keating's works (*Foras Feasa ar Éirinn, Trí Bior-ghaoithe an Bháis* or *Eochair-sgiath an Aifrinn*) and a song composed by Proinsias Doibhlin (possibly the poem for Mac na Midhe mentioned above).
55. NLI G 57. Nessa Ní Shéaghdha, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland* fasc. ii (Dublin, 1961), pp 78-9.
56. Aodh Mac Aingil, *Scáthán shacramuinte na haithridhe* ed. Cainneach Ó Maonaigh (Dublin, 1952). Paul Walsh stated that Mac Solaidh's copy of the book was held in the library of St. Patrick's College,

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- Maynooth. Paul Walsh, 'Prehistoric Meath', in Nollaig Ó Muraíle (ed.), *Irish leaders and learning throughout the ages. Paul Walsh* (Dublin, 2003), p. 58; Ní Mhunghaile, 'An eighteenth-century Gaelic scribe's private library', p. 33.
57. Flower, *BL Cat.* ii, p. 338; RIA 24 C 55.
 58. Ní Shéaghdha, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts*, fasc. vi (Dublin, 1980), pp 25-6.
 59. Russell Library, NUI Maynooth, Ms. MF 5.
 60. University College Cork Ms. 21.
 61. Éamonn Ó Tuathail, 'Gradam do Dhomnall Ó Mhaolriain', *An tUltach*, xxvi, no. 4 (Aibreán 1950), p. 9. Mág Uidhir is believed to have been from the Sliabh Dhá Chon area in south-west Fermanagh. For a discussion, see Nollaig Ó Muraíle, 'Séamus Mág Uidhir, a scribe of Breifne, and his work', *Briefne*, xlii (2006), pp 207-26.
 62. For a detailed consideration of Raymond, see Harrison, *Ag cruinniú meala*, passim; idem, *The Dean's friend*, passim.
 63. Harrison, *Ag cruinniú meala*, pp 61-2.
 64. Clare O'Halloran, *Golden ages and barbarous nations* (Cork, 2004), p. 601.
 65. Ó Neachtain retained the manuscript after Raymond's death until 1743.
 66. For Walker and Brooke, see Lesa Ní Mhunghaile, *Ré órga na nGael: Joseph Cooper Walker agus stair na mbard* (Indreabhán, 2013); eadem, *Charlotte Brooke's Reliques of Irish poetry* (Dublin, 2009).
 67. Pádraig de Brún, 'An Irish manuscript of eighteenth-century Meath' in *Ríocht na Midhe*, x (1991), pp 86-91. The relationship between these men is unknown.
 68. de Brún, 'An Irish manuscript', p. 88. The manuscript later came into the possession of Edward O'Reilly and afterwards the Belfast scholar Robert Mac Adam.
 69. BL Eg. 179.
 70. de Brún, 'An Irish manuscript', p. 91.
 71. BL Eg. 164 and Eg. 174.
 72. Ó Mórdha, 'Manuscript and scribal traditions in Meath', p. 79.
 73. Liverpool Ms 12065. Alfrid MacLochlainn, 'Irish manuscripts at Liverpool' in *Celtica*, vi (1958), pp 230-32.
 74. Séamus P. Ó Mórdha, 'Lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge i gColáiste Phádraig' in *Studia Hibernica*, i (1961), pp 178-9.
 75. RIA 23 L 32.
 76. This manuscript is now held in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra. Ó Mórdha, 'Lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge', p. 179.
 77. It has been ascribed to various poets including Giollabhrighde Ó hEoghusa. See, *Dán na mBráthar Mionúr*, ii, p. 333.
 78. This manuscript later came into the possession of the schoolmaster William Andrews, whose name appears on f. 88. Andrews was from the Cruisetown area and was an associate of the schoolmasters Michael Clarke and Philip Coalrake. See below.
 79. The relationship between the men is unknown but they may have been son and father respectively.
 80. Séamus P. Ó Mórdha, 'Leabhar Bhantiarna Inis Ceithleann' in *Studia Hibernica*, ii (1962), p. 220.
 81. In 1810 it was owned by Francis junior, who had inherited it on his father Proinsias's death. The prominent Meath scribe Peadar Ó Gealacháin had access to the codex in 1825 when he made a copy from it, stating in a colophon that Pilip was a brother of Francis (junior, presumably). Ó Gealacháin's transcript is now UCC Ms 55. Ó Gealacháin taught school in Pilip's house in October 1824 and from 30 November 1824 until 13 April 1825 and the transcription was probably undertaken during this period. See, Ó Mórdha, 'Leabhar Bhantiarna Inis Ceithleann', p. 219; Breandán Ó Buachalla, *I mBéal Feirste cois cuain* (Dublin, 1968), p. 124. For Philip Cassidy and Francis Cassidy, see Pádraig de Brún, *Scriptural instruction in Irish. The Irish Society and its teachers, 1818-1827* (Dublin, 2009), pp 171-72. The manuscript eventually left the Cassidy family in 1838 when it was sold to the Rev. Henry Mac Manus (c.1817-1864) in Ballyjamesduff, Co. Cavan, first Irish missionary of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and author of *Sketches of the Irish highlands* (1863). He was vocal in his defence of the Irish language. De Brún, *Scriptural instruction*, p. 171; Roger Blaney, *Presbyterians and the Irish language* (Belfast, 1996), pp 99-102.

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82. Queen's University Belfast Ms 2. This original manuscript is now lost but a microfilm copy is held in the National Library of Ireland.
83. For a discussion of the Society, see below. The Kingscourt resolutions were signed by Irish School teachers at a mass meeting held in Kingscourt, in which they stated that their Catholicism was not compromised by their reading of the Protestant Bible.
84. Tomás Ó Cléirigh, 'A Parish Priest's manuscript' in *Bonaventura*, ii (1938), pp 49-58. Part of the manuscript's importance lies in the fact that the spelling reflects the dialect of Irish spoken in the locality.
85. De Brún, *Scriptural instruction*, p. 258.
86. Séamus Mac Gabhann, 'A people's art: the great songs of Meath and Oriel' in *Ríocht na Midhe*, ix no. 4 (1998), pp 103-119; idem, 'Fr. Paul O'Brien of Cormeen (1763-1820): folk-poet and Maynooth professor', *Ríocht na Midhe*, x (1999), pp 125-151.
87. Ronald Black, 'Catalogue of Gaelic manuscripts in the National Library of Scotland: Adv. MS 72.2.7, Pádraig Ó Macháin, (director), *Irish Script on Screen — Meamráim Páipéar Ríomhaire*, Online: School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2011. URL: http://www.isos.dias.ie/master.html?http://www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/NLS/english/index.html?ref=http://www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/NLS/NLS_Adv_MS_72_1_8/english/manuscript.html.
88. The Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland, Ingleston MS A.i.15 (g).
89. Franciscan Library Killiney, Ms FLK A40; O'Higgins, 'My songs and myself', p. 32.
90. See sheets attached to RIA 24 B 18.
91. Myles Dillon, Canice Mooney and Pádraig de Brún, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Franciscan Library Killiney* (Dublin, 1969), 89; *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* (1905), 808-9. For further information on Gibney, see de Brún, *Scriptural instruction in the vernacular*, pp 98, 388 n.3, 456, 476.
92. Séamus Mac Gabhann, 'Continuity and transition in the poetry of James Tevlin' in *Ríocht na Midhe*, xvi (2005), p. 83.
93. For a detailed consideration of these men, see Séamus Mac Gabhann, 'Forging identity: Michael Clarke and the Hidden Ireland' in *Ríocht na Midhe*, ix, no. 2 (1996), pp 73-96; Philip O'Connell, *The schools and scholars of Breifne* (Dublin, 1942), pp 303-32.
94. Michael Clarke, provided material and assistance to the scholars Edward O'Reilly and James Hardiman. For contact between the poets, see Ó Buachalla, *I mBéal Feirste cois cuain*, pp 127-131.
95. Séamus Mac Gabhann, 'Salvaging cultural identity: Peter Gallegan (1792-1860)', *Ríocht na Midhe*, ix, no. 1 (1994-95), pp 71-87. James Byrne, for whom RIA 24 P 11 was written by the Munster scribe Michael O'Callaghan in 1829, also lived in Kilbeg parish, but had spent time working for the Irish Society in Mallow, Co. Cork. This manuscript regularly came into the possession of Ó Gealacáin and was eventually sold to him by Byrne. See, de Bún, *Scriptural Instruction*, p. 160; Ó Buachalla, *I mBéal Feirste cois cuain*, p. 280.
96. Edinburgh University Library, Ms. Gen 43D.
97. RIA 3 B 39.
98. De Brún, *Scriptural instruction*, pp 436-7.
99. See Royal Irish Academy Ordinance Survey Name Books for Meath. See also, De Brún, *Scriptural instruction*, p. 437.
100. For a comprehensive treatment of the Bible School teachers, see de Bún, *Scriptural Instruction*, passim.
101. RIA 23 L 6.
102. De Brún, *Scriptural instruction*, p. 90.
103. For Magee, see De Brún, *Scriptural instruction*, p. 366. Ó Gealacáin appears to have had access to a wide range of manuscripts. A note in Cambridge Ms. Add. 6563 states, for example, 'from James Daly's manuscript'. This is probably James Daly, an inspector of schools for the Irish Society, who was also a subscriber to *Man's final end*. De Brún, *Scriptural instruction*, p. 203. Farrelly came into the possession of RIA 23 C 1, which was transcribed in Taafes Town, Donaghpatrick in 1719 by Mícheál Ó Háirt, and on his death it was presented by his wife to Ó Gealacáin. See, Ó Buachalla, *I mBéal Feirste cois cuain*, pp 280-81.
104. Tomás Ó Brádaigh, 'Peadar Dubh Ó Dálaigh. Fear léinn agus scríobhaí' in *Ríocht na Midhe*, ii (1959), pp 47-52; de Brún, *Scriptural instruction*, p. 88.

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105. Herity, *Ordnance Survey letters Meath*, pp. 61, 63-4. It would appear that Ó Dálaigh's ancestors were originally from Kilconnell, Co. Galway.
106. Robin Flower has drawn attention to the fact that Ó Dálaigh's manuscripts follow the system of aspiration suggested by P. MacElligot in an essay entitled 'Observations on the Gaelic language' published in *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Dublin* vol. 1 (Dublin, 1808), pp. 28-35. Flower, *BL Cat.* ii, p. 135.
107. BL Eg. 172. Ten manuscripts transcribed by Ó Pronntaigh are still extant. Flower, *BL Cat.* ii, pp 118-9.
108. Flower, *BL Cat.* ii, p. 136.
109. Blaney, *Presbyterians and the Irish language*, pp 93-4.
110. NLI G 702 (4). Ó Buachalla, *I mBéal Feirste Cois Cuain*, pp 115-16, 291-2. Ó Duinn was also a subscriber to Clarke's *Man's Final End*.
111. Peter Connell, *The land and people of County Meath, 1750-1850* (Dublin, 2004), chapter 7.
112. Ó Muirgheasa, *Ambráin na Midhe*, p. 116.
113. Fionntán de Brún, 'Expressing the nineteenth century in Irish: The poetry of Aodh Mac Domhnaill (1802-67)' in *New Hibernia Review*, xv, no. 1 (Spring, 2011), pp 91-95.
114. Colm Beckett, *Aodh Mac Domhnaill. Dánta* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1987), p. 46.
115. Neil Buttimer, 'A stone on the cairn: the Great Famine in later Gaelic manuscripts' in Chris Morash and Richard Hayes (eds), *Fearful realities. New perspectives on the Famine* (Dublin, 1996), pp 96-7. Translations are by Buttimer.