

Enniskillen, Nov 6th 1834

Dear Sir,

I send you the name books of Templecarn, Devenish, Enniskillen, Derryvullan, Boho and Inishmacsaint. I expect that Mr. Sharkey will have the usual watch on me. It is very difficult to adhere to the analogies of Derry and Down in the names of this county, because the pronunciation is nearly Connaught. The termination reagh, I was obliged to make reevagh in some instances, and garve, I had to make garrow. The word TAOBH, i.e. side or brae-face frequently enters into the names here; this we have anglicized Tieve in Derry, Down & Antrim. I have used the same spelling of it here, but I am afraid it is too violent as every authority makes it Teev. The more northerly pronunciation is tee-oov, the Fermanagh one Teev. I wish you would consider this, and let me hear your opinion, for I assure you that I am very diffident of my own judgement; and proprietors are frequently displeased when they conceive that a violent innovation is made in the spelling of their townlands. I do not, however, wish to be controlled too much by proprietors, as they in general, know very little about the subject and what they do know is generally wrong or pedantic. Posterity will be better qualified to judge than the present generation.

The word TOIN, i.e. bottom (of which I spoke in Derry) frequently forms the first part of names of places here, as TOIN AOIL, i.e. bottom of lime stone in Boho parish. I am doubtful of the English spelling to be adopted. I refer you to this also, and request that you will let me know your opinion as soon as convenient.

The word CAISIOL, which is not understood in Derry, or in any county in which I have been, is well understood here; by it they mean a circular enclosure built of stone: DEANAIGIDHE CAISIOL DO'N EALLACH, erect a cashel for the cattle; is well understood in Tooraa.

The word IUBHAR, yew, frequently occurs. I think it is Dubourdien denies that the yew is a native plant of Ireland. I have found it growing in native luxuriance on the cliffs of Fweealt in Tooraa and on a very steep and precipitous rock in the townland of Monawilkin. (1)

The village of Monea is called in Irish MUINE FHIADH, i.e. hill of the deer. The name is accounted for by a story similar to those told to account for old churches in Derry. The virgin St. Faber first attempted to build her church in Kildrum at the place where the holy well now called Tobar Faber is to be seen, but what had been built in the course of the day was destroyed in the night by some invisible being. At last a deer, blessed beast! was pleased to point out a site where Faber might erect her church, without interruption. He carried Faber's books on his horns to Monea, and there the holy virgin finished the erection of her church without annoyance. (2) But when the deer was crossing the Sillees

River (ABHAINN NA SAILISE) he slipped on its slippery banks and the books fell off his horns and it was sometime before he could fix them up again. This was affected by the genius or sheaver (shaver) who presided over the Sillees, who did all in his power to prevent the establishment of the christian religion in that neighbourhood. As soon as Faber had understood that the demon of the river thus annoyed the good beast, she cursed the river praying that the Sillees might be cursed with sterility of fish and fertility in the destruction of human life, and that it might run against the hill. The curse was pronounced in the following Irish words:-

MI-ADH EISC A'S ADH BAIDHTE

AG RITH ANAGHAIDH AN AIRD GO LA BRATHA.

There is a stone coffin in the island of Devenish called Moluse's grave; it is hollowed in the shape of a man, but there is a report that no man now living, would fit in it. Several have tried, because it is believed that any one who could force his body into it would immediately be relieved from any corporal malady under which he might labour. It fits many in length but the room for the shoulders is found too narrow, and on the contrary it is found broad enough for the reception of several, but the length is too long or too short! It is not like the dwarf's grave at Tara mentioned by Cambrensis, which fitted any one large or small that should wish to be in it.

There is a townland in the parish of Temple-carn called by the odd name of Portnablahy or the "port of the butter-milk." (3) This is where O'Flannigan landed the tribute of butter-milk which he was forced to pay to the chief Magrath who lived at the other side of the Great Lough Erne. So tradition says, but I think it was the place where he landed his tribute of butter and milk payable to O'Donnell, not to Magrath. I do not find the Magraths mentioned in the Annals as chiefs, they being always called Erenaghs of Termon Magrath; whereas O'Flannigan of Tooraa was a chief of considerable power and respectability.

The Boa island is called by the Irish people Oilen Badhbha (pron: Bauva) it is called Bava in the Inquisitions, it is a pity to have its original name so corrupted, the proper anglicized spelling would be BAUV Island.

The monastery of Gaula mentioned by Burke Hib: Domin: p. 331, and by Stuart Mem: Arm: 309, is now called by the anglicized name of Gola and situated about 6 miles S.W. of Enniskillen and about 1½ mile south of Lisbellaw village. It is called GABHLA, or forks by the Irish people, a name which is certainly derived from the points of land running into the lough forming forks. I have not yet seen the place, but I am informed by the Revd. Mr Sheill, P.P. of Enniskillen, that there are no remains of the monastery or village now to be seen.

The principal aboriginal families in Lurg are the following:-

1. Muldoons, no longer chiefs, nor higher than the rank of farmers, but they are said to be very decent respectable men, fond of justice and able to fight. A dozen of the warlike "men of Lurg" (FEARA LUIRG) would beat a funeral of the men of any other barony in the county. They are tall and stout with large heads and round faces. (4)

2. O'Cassidy; their original residence was Ballycassidy, about 3 miles north of Enniskillen. (5)

3. McGolricks are a numerous tribe about Belleek. I know nothing about them. (6)

4. Mac Mulkin. (7).

5. Magrath. (8)

6. Scollan. (9)

7. Gilfedder.

8. Gallogly, in Irish O'Galloglaigh, synonymous with Gallowglass. Curinns are numerous in the county but I suspect that they are originally from Connaught, they are called in Irish Mag Cuairin.

9. MacRorys; Erenaghs of Machaire Croise, are very numerous in Lurg yet.

The O'Galladhas, the guards of Lough Melvin exist yet in the neighbourhood of it.

The O'Hones officials of Lough Erne are called Hoynes in the country, but those who have set up shops in Enniskillen refine it to Owens. (10) You will hear the Enniskilleners say, J. Owens of Ennisk, son of J. Hoynes of Boho!

The name O'Leanain, which frequently occurs in the Annals has now analogically made Lennon, but the name Mac Gille Finnen, first made Mc Ellinnion is now shamefully anglicized (11) Leonard.

The Mac Cosgraigh and Mac Gilla Coisgle of the Annals are both made Mc Coskers; and the Mc Coskers of Derry have corrupted their name from O'Cosgraghan! It is difficult to trace these names to their original, but the surest place to find them is in the mountains, where the original names are still strictly retained.

The ecclesiastical name O'Fiaich of Lough Erne is now called Fee. There are several families of the name in Enniskillen and its vicinity.

The name O'Corcan to be seen among the Jury of Milesians in 1603, is now called O'Corragon, and by the Irish O'CORRACAIN; they are very numerous about Enniskillen yet.

To-morrow I intend to move towards Lough Mac Nean, but I do not know yet where I can fix myself for a few days, in that neighbourhood. (12)

Since writing the above I had to give up the name books of Devenish and Inishmacsaint to Lt. Taylor, who sent for them to insert some descriptions of townlands.

Yours invariably,
J. O'Donovan.

COMMENT

(1) Yew trees are still growing in profusion in Monawilkin townland in 1993.

(2) Obviously the old beliefs remained strong in this area and here the old Gods had no intention of being ousted from their ancient place of worship. O'Donovan records similar stories in Derry when St. Onan found a dreadful beast throwing down at night everything that was built during the day until an eagle came and moved the stones to a new site at Aireagal.

O'Donovan takes a great interest in the spirit world of Fermanagh and indeed of other counties he visits and, notably, does not confine himself to the post-Christian times. For some this spirit world still exists in Fermanagh even today.

In sensible historical conversation in 1992, with some people of Toora who know nothing of John O'Donovan or his tale of the virgin, St Faber and her deer, I am informed that they have seen the tracks of a young girl and her companion animal, said to be a donkey, in recent times on snow covered ground or in muddy gaps. The tracks are said to presage a sad or bad event in the locality. Is this the ancient manifestation of the spirit world Christianised so long ago and still around today?

And who or what is still making the tracks?

(3) Portnablahy or the "port of the butter-milk." is but a short distance from Mc Grath's castle near Pettigo built in the early Plantation period by the famous or notorious, Bishop Miler Mc Grath and his son. Miler began ecclesiastical life as a Roman Catholic Bishop of Down and Connor and changed his allegiance to become Church of Ireland Bishop of Clogher. This helped him secure the family lands about Lough Derg for which Church lands the Mc Graths had been hereditary Herenachs. This position involved the running of the monastic estate of Lough Derg and supplying the needs of the monastery. Overlooking Mc Grath's Castle is Margay Hill or Market Hill which was the site of the great fair at which tribute was handed over, according to Fr. P. Dinneen's, "The Maguires of Fermanagh", to Maguire rather than O'Donnell by the local McGraths.

Local tradition and local historians in the Pettigo area point out the boundary between Maguire and O'Donnell as passing from Lough Erne up the Letter River and then up a tributary to Drumgunn Lough and marked by a stone hedge until reaching a cairn in the townland of Carrickrory ... Rory's Rock.

The principal tribute to Maguire was paid to him at Rath More Miodhbholg or the Great Rath of the Central Hollow overlooking the waterfall of Belleek. Maguire had a "guesthouse" here where he stayed for a month each year, dispensing justice, hunting and feasting. It was to here that he summoned O'Muldoon of Lurg and O'Flanagan of Toora to pay tribute. His stay at Margay Hill was only for one day and he then moved on to collect tribute elsewhere.

(4) Muldoons were for centuries the princes of the barony of Lurg. They are mentioned in the Annals of the Four Masters as early as 1000 A.D. when Dubhdara O Maolduin died. They were renowned as fighting men according to O Dugain who reports:-

"Muintir Maolduin of Lurg who are not weak
Deep their swords in battle."

(5) The O'Cassidy family of Ballycassidy are reputed to be the ancestors of the current American President, Bill Clinton. It was the fifth most common native Fermanagh name in 1962. They have been very prominent in Fermanagh history in literature, medicine and religion. Two have been noted poets, Giolla Mochuda Mor O'Caiside who flourished c 1130 and Tomas O Caiside who wrote in the early 18th century.

(6) The Mc Goldricks seem to have been the ruling family about Belleek before their domination by the Maguires. The family retained "minor gentry" status in the Mulleek area east of Belleek until the beginning of the C17. In 1054 the Mag Ualghairg are described as Lords of Cairbre and according to Fr Livingstone the Fermanagh Mc Goldricks are from Breffny [Cavan] and descended from Ualghark (Ulrick) O'Rourke of Breffny who died on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1231.

(7) Mc Mulkins have been a difficult family to trace in Fermanagh. The family may have a Fermanagh origin. The only certainty is that they have lived in Lurg near Irvinestown.

(8) Mc Graths are found about the Sillees valley near Derrygonnelly and as a distinct and separate group about Pettigo and the western borders of Fermanagh. The Pettigo sept were once lords of the Ballybofey area in County Donegal until driven from there by the O'Donnells. They were guardians of the monastic lands about Lough Derg for over three centuries. Their most famous and controversial figure was Bishop Miler Mc Grath who having been a Roman Catholic bishop made the transition to being the first Protestant bishop of Clogher. It is safe to

say that in a financially very successful and very long life he continued to provoke and angered all shades of religious opinion.

(9) Scallons were a herenach family of Ballyscullion, Rathlawky Demons, County Derry but were present in the barony of Lurg long before Cuchonnaght. O'Scallon was granted a pardon in 1607.

(10) Owens or O hEoghain were a very notable Church family in Fermanagh. They originally came from Sligo and were descended from Lachlan, the father of Rory O'Connor, High King of Ireland. They were brought to the county by the Maguires.

(11) O'Donovan greatly dislikes the anglicisation of Irish surnames. He comments on the same process in action in Derry. He records the Mac'Feys as rapidly changing their names into Monteague, the Maguiggins into Godwins, the MacCathmhaoils into Campbells, the O'Lyns into Lindsays, the O'Brollaghans into Bradleys, the MacConveys into Conways, the MacRorys into Rogers and he adds the names of Irish Families will soon be totally lost.

(12) A notable omission from O'Donovan's investigation into placenames in Fermanagh is that of Mulleek. This name is a derivation of Miodhbholg and the area formed a kingdom based at the Great Rath of Miodhbholg at Belleek which extended into present day Donegal and Leitrim. The kingdom originated with two sons of Cana, a 5th century King of Ulaidh, named Cise and Serrach. Mulleek is not entered on any map but is still alive in the consciousness of the people who live there and who still today style themselves as people of Mulleek. It is a quite remarkable omission considering the time O'Donovan spent in the area and the assistance he was given.

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Enniskillen, Nov 8th 1834.

Dear Sir,

I was weather-bound yesterday; I move now to Holywell. (1) The weather has been very unfavourable and has impeded my progress from the beginning.

I enclose a letter to Major Bloomfield, please to have it sent free to him and also send back O'Reilly's correspondence.

Yours invariably,
John O'Donovan.

COMMENT.

1. Holywell was the commercial and population centre of the Belleek area before the rise to prominence of the village of that name on the arrival of the Sligo Leitrim Railway towards the end of the century.

November 10th 1834.

Dear Sir,

Please to send me from the Annals all the passages relating to Muintir Pheodachain. The name and situation of this ancient territory are yet remembered, but it is not recognised as a parochial or baronial division, but just like Moyroe or Moyola in Derry, the remnant of an ancient Irish principality. It lies between Lough Mac Neane and Lough Erne, and was, one of the seven Tuaths of ancient Fermanagh. The very remarkable mountain of Belmore is called by the aborigines BEL MOR MHUINTIR PHEODACHAIN. I forget who the chief of this territory was; I suppose it was Magauran, now Mc Gauveran, as the territory of the Mac Manus lies further to the south. I have discovered the situation of Seanat Mc Manus where the Annals of Ulster were compiled. It is the present Belisle according to the tradition in the country, corroborated by the situation of it given in the Maguire MS. Its situation was never pointed out before by any writer of Irish history or topography! The patron saint of Killesher is Laisir a virgin, whose church lies in ruins near the eastern extremity of Lough Mac Neane. There is a holy well near it called Tobar Laisreach.

There is another old church called Tempul-an-airfrinn i.e. church of the mass in a townland of the same name in the parish of Cleenish. (2) This appears remotely ancient and exhibits the names of the aboriginal families of the parish and the neighbourhood. These are:-

1. Mac Scollog, now Farmer.
2. Luney.
3. Fee, in Irish O'Fiaich.
4. Mac Ellinnion, now Leonard! GILLE FEINNEN.
5. Killesher, now Green! Gilla-Leise.
6. Lally or Lilly, in Irish O'Gailghile.
7. O'Hone, now Owns, pronounced Hoines.
8. Mac Hughs are numerous. These were the first that banished the Kehernaghs out of the parish.
9. Mac Ultachan.
10. Mc Illoon.
11. Dolans.
12. Coracans, rattling fellows fond of fight & fun.
13. Mac a Reevey.
14. Mac Manus.

The word ACHADH, which is not understood in Down or Derry is well understood hereto mean field. It was translated campulus by Adamnan upwards of 1100 years since.

Lough Mac Neane is the Loch-da-en of Irish history. There is a tradition that it took its name from two eagles that built in one of its islands.

Binaghlin Mt. is the BEANN EACHLABHRA, [Peak of the horse herd?] of the Annalists. Dr. O'Connor states in a note that BEANN EACHLABHRA is Swadlinbar. The latter is always called Mullen-Iarainn?, i.e. the iron-mill by the Irish.

The Mac Auleys or Clanawley are very numerous here. I have just had a long conversation with one of the name, and he says that the tradition in the family is that Maguire had 7 sons among whom he divided Fermanagh into 7 parts. That one of these sons was called AMHLAOIBH (Awley) to whom was allotted the barony afterwards called Clanawley, and that the Mac Awleys are his descendants. This does not disagree with the Annals. The same old man says that he heard his grand-father tell that the yearly rent paid by his grand-father to Maguire at Enniskillen was methers of butter.

Many stories are told about Capt. Cuhunny Maguire of Tempo. They also tell that when Bryan and the late Constantine were young boys they were in the habit of placing two apples on each other's heads and shoot them off with two pistols. The father delighted in this! All the old Maguires here exclaim that the Tipperary men did not give Cohonny fair-play!

Yours etc.,
J. O'Donovan.

What think you does Swanlinbar signify? (3) It is not Irish and some people think that the name has reference to the bars of Iron wrought in the Iron mill there. The iron ore they say, was got at Slieve an Iarainn.

Dr. O'Connor and all the Topographical Dictionaries (if I remember rightly) state that the Shannon has its source in Slieve an Iarainn, but all the old men here assure me that the Shannon has its source in the mountain called Cuilceach in the county of Cavan. In corroboration of this an old verse or quatrain is quoted which satisfies me that the real source of the Shannon is in a lough at the foot of Cuilceagh, a very beautiful and lofty mountain. I cannot but call to mind the assertion of Giraldus Cambrensis that the Shannon emptied itself into the sea by another course!! If this was the case in the time of Cambrensis (1202) the Cuilceagh mountain, the highest in the neighbourhood, must have been since thrown up in an earthquake. But the fact seems to be that Cambrensis never surveyed the ground, and that like Ptolemy he had only heard that the Shannon was a large river in Ireland running from the north towards the south.

COMMENT.

(1) In this letter of November 10th 1834 O'Donovan records that he has found out that the Annals of Ulster, was compiled at Belleisle to the east of Enniskillen, near Lisbellaw, and he believes that he is the first man in modern times to have discovered this. What he really means is that he is the first scholar to be aware of this since the old seanachies of the country knew this all along. It was only the scholars that had lost the information.

The instigator of the project of writing the Annals of Ulster, one of the primary sources of Irish history, was Cathal Og MacManus, Vicar General of Clogher who also held the positions of parish priest of Inniskeen, dean of Lough Erne, a canon of Armagh and the chieftainship of the MacManus clan. He encouraged a group of scholars who had access to "very many other books" as they attempted to write the Annals of Ulster at the family headquarters, Seanadh Mic Maghnusa also known as Ballymacmanus. It was later renamed, Belleisle, by Sir Ralph Gore, the fourth baronet who was variously an M.P. for Donegal, a Privy Counsellor, Chancellor of the Exchequer and, in 1729, Speaker of the Irish House of Parliament. The Gore family had obtained the ancestral Mac Manus lands at the time of the Plantation of Ulster.

The chief scribe was Rory Lunny and the work was brought to the year 1498 and others later extended it to 1504. Cathal Og MacManus died of smallpox in 1498. The Manuscript remained at Belleisle until at least 1632-1636 when it was made use of by the compilers of the Annals of the Four Masters.

(2) Tempul-an-airrinn (The church of the mass) beside Holywell is an ancient ecclesiastical centre associated with St. Sinnell according to some and St. Patrick according to others. A curious tradition states that the stones to erect the church were carried there on the backs of sheep. The well from which the place derives its name is a magnificent and large uprising of water from the depths. This leaves the well by three different exits. It is about 45 feet by 21 feet in extent. It once was in great repute as having the ability to cure vast numbers of nervous and paralytic disorders.

Along with the church it is the centre of a penitential exercise which was traditionally carried out between the Saturday before the last Sunday in July until the 15th of August of each year. At one period the church banned the Station of Holywell on account of abuses but while the locals abandoned the practice it was continued by others. There has been a renewed interest in it of late.

Its antiquity undoubtedly goes back long before Christianity into Celtic and pre-Celtic beliefs. It is hardly a matter of coincidence that the period of the station coincides with the old pre-Christian feast of Lughnasa (the last weekend

in July), a Druidic celebration of the "Sun God Lugh" in thanksgiving for the first fruits of the harvest.

Before the rise of the village of Belcoo in the latter half of the 19th century with the coming of the railway, Holywell was the commercial and population centre of the area. A church and two mills, a corn mill and a tuck mill, supplied by the huge capacity of the holy well, and a famous market testify to its importance. The market cross still stands and if one could touch the cross with hand or stick and swear that one had transacted no business in the fair that day then you could leave without paying market tolls. The Holywell fair was also very famous for its faction fights.

Further information is to be had in the Clogher Record of 1957 in an article, "The Parish of Cleenish: District of Holywell." by VIATOR.

(3) Swanlinbar is mentioned in Boates', Natural History of Ireland 1726 as the site of an Ironworks. In the early Plantation period the abundant forests of Ireland were ruthlessly exploited to smelt low grade iron ore. Later the town of Swanlinbar developed as a spa town and was frequented by the Irish gentry in the mid eighteenth century.

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Belturbet,
Novr. 12th 1834.

Dear Sir,

I walked to-day from Florence Court hither, keeping Benn Eachlabhra for a long time in view. There is a tradition that Donn Maguire, the first prince of Fermanagh inhabits this peak yet, and it is firmly believed that whenever any of his real descendants die, a splinc falls off the rocky face of the Binn. He goes by the name of Donn na Binne, and presides over all the fairies of Fermanagh. This Donn frequently assisted Maguire in his battles. Tradition preserves one instance of his influence in turning the scale of fight against the English on one occasion at the Two Mile River. Maguire had exhausted all his ammunition, but by the invisible agency of Donn na Binne, he gained the battle by casting Irish balls (stones).

All the old men agree that Beul atha na m-Brioscadh, where Maguire intercepted the passage of those who were going with provisions to the relief of the garrison of Enniskillen is Drummane Bridge on the Arney River. Beul atha na m-Brioscadh was on the road from Cavan to Enniskillen within four miles of the latter. It does not appear that the name given to the ford by Maguire was long retained.

I passed through the parish of Kinawly and met a very intelligent old man by the name of Terence or Torlogh Carran (TOIRR MC CARTHAINN) who is