

# TOWNLAND NAMES OF THE COUNTY OF CLARE.

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## FIRST PART.

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According to the maps of the Ordnance Survey, there are in the County of Clare 2,176 townlands. In almost every case the names of these can be interpreted. That county has been so entirely exempt from the corrupting influence brought on by the introduction of the English language into the nomenclature of the country, that there is less difficulty in making out the meaning of its localities than exists in reference to almost any other county in Ireland. At the same time it must be admitted that we derive little help from Irish writings, for Clare or its concerns are rarely mentioned by authors. However, the precision with which the names are pronounced by Irish-speaking people makes the work comparatively easy. Only twenty or thirty townlands are found having names the meaning of which cannot be discovered, and if our dictionaries were more complete, no doubt, these also could be found out, as well as the rest.

All the place names of Clare are unmistakably Celtic, thus proving that whatever race or people, whether Fomorians, Firbolgs, Tuaith-de-danaans, or Milesians, inhabited the district, they were Gadhaels, and spoke the same tongue as that used by the people of the present day. The surprising richness of that dialect, and its suitability for giving descriptive titles to localities, are demonstrated by the fact that in those parts of Western Europe wherein the Celts had a settlement, the names of many places to this day are in their language. As may be conjectured, the designations given to localities savour very strongly of

their situation, soil, aspect, and natural features. Hills, rocks, rivers, bogs, marshes, mountains, and a thousand other characteristics of the country are made use of. The aspect of a place, the uses to which it is applied, its productions, the battles fought there, and various other things descriptive of it, are brought into requisition with singular felicity and appropriateness. The County of Clare is no exception to the general rule. We find there numbers of townlands named after peculiarities in their situation, quality of soil, or position with reference to neighbouring woods, marshes, hills, or other natural features. These require hardly any explanation, being known at a glance to all Irish-speaking people; but there are others deriving their nomenclature from times when naught but the Irish language in its ancient form was spoken, and which demand more attention. To the elucidation of these we propose in a special manner to devote this paper. We shall take the county by baronies, beginning with Lower Bunratty. That barony consists of mountain, old red sandstone, and limestone soil, and has the River Shannon as its southern boundary. In olden times, like all parts of Ireland, it seems to have been extensively planted, and frequent reference is made to woods. Some allusion is made to rivers and weirs, as in the case of Bunratty itself, which signifies the mouth of the River Raithe, evidently the name in olden times of the stream subsequently called the Ogarney, from the sept of O'Kearney, who inhabited the neighbourhood of Six-mile-bridge, which in Irish is named Droichiod abhain-o-Garna. Garryncurra, weir garden; Carrigerry, rock of the salmon weir (airé); Quay Island, Oilean caedh (marsh); Sod Island, which should be Sad Island, Oilean dubhach (sad); Drumgeely, storm (gailbhe); Tullyvarraga, hill by the sea; Rineanna, marshy promontory; Parteen, the little landing-place; Portdrine, the landing-place beside blackthorn; Oilean a 1oin, seal island, near Athlunkard bridge.

But, as before mentioned, the great source of place names is to be found in the characteristic of situation, soil, aspect, colour, and such like. In this barony we have Lisduff and Lislea, the black and grey homesteads; Breckinosh, the speckled island; Tullyglass, the green hill, and Ballyglass, the green dwelling-place. Parkroe, Ballyroe, and Cragroe, meaning the red field, homestead, and rocky pasture, respectively. Numbers of hills are described such as Corlack, Corlea, hill sides simply; Ballintlea, mountain side, "tlea" being the genitive

case of sliabh, a mountain; other hills are Knockaun na mbroide, hostage hill, ridiculously Anglicised Gallows-hill: Knockaun simply meaning a little hill; Drummin, a sloping hill; Drumline, hill of the spear (laigeán); Clenagh, sloping ground; Corcacknockaun, river holme of hillocks; and Knocksaggart, priest's hill.

Of bogs, marshes, and rivers, we have a considerable number in the district. Moyhill and Meelick, a marsh; Reaskcommoge, marsh of the winding stream; Knockalappa, marsh hill; Mooghaun, morass; Rath-laheen, the little slough; Curragh an bhata, and Curraghkilleen, marsh of the post and little wood, respectively; Sooreeny, from *suir*, water; Treannahow, the river field; Carrigoran, clear water (*fuaràn*). The Irish language is peculiarly rich in words descriptive of wet ground.

We find Clonloghan, chaff meadow; Lisheen, little dwelling-place; Crossagh and Fybagh, streaked land; Cool, a corner, and Coolycasey, O'Casey's corner; Garrynamona, bog garden; Pullagh, a bog full of pits; Moneen-na-gliggin, the little bog of the skulls; Pass, a footway; Urlan, a place producing long, coarse grass; Latoon, the half, or division into two equal parts of Thomond; Ballysheen, of the hero Oisín; Ballymulcashel, the low cashel or caher; Ballinfunta, of the pound; Carrow-an-erribul, the tail quarter; Shandangan, the old fortress; Ballygirreen, of the dung (*giodhar*); Ballysallagh, muddy or miry; and Glennagross, so named from the crosses placed there to mark the boundary of the diocese of Limerick.

There are only two oak woods belonging to the barony—namely, Derrymore and Derrybeg; but we find the names of woods, consisting of other timber, such as Culleen, the little holly wood; Bealachullin, hollygap; Ardkyle, the high wood (a place well known to readers of Irish history as the home of the learned family of Mulconry for many generations); Castlecrine, the castle wood; Cratloe, sallow trees (*Crat sillach*). There were three elm woods in the barony, each called Lackyle (*Leamh, elm*). There was a red wood, Rosroe; an old wood, Shanakyle, and a place designated Carrownakilla (of the wood). Finally, there was a valley called Kilnacrea, which seems to mean the wood of the earthen bank.

Besides the woods, we find several forests and tracts of land covered with shrubs and brambles. These are—Feenagh, forest; Knocknaskeha,

white thorn ; Gurraun, brushwood ; Clonmony, briars ; and Kilnacrandy, stunted trees.

The Cratloe mountain range contained three places to which cattle were driven for pasture during the summer months. In the Irish language such localities were called "Booleys," and the hovels in which the herdsmen slept, "Boths." Thus, we have Boollyvoughalan, the rag-weed milking place ; Boollynacausk, to which the cows were not sent till Easter ; Boonabinnia, the hut on the mountain summit.

A few townlands are called after rocks and stones. These are—Carrownalegaun, place of the standing stones ; Cloghlea, the grey stone ; Stonehall, Baile-na-cloiche ; Ballinacragga ; and Ballycar, the pillar stone. There are also some places bearing the prefixes of Cappa and Gort, both meaning cultivated ground, such as Cappagh ; Cappanalaught, the field of graves ; Cappantimore, of the great house ; and Gortatogher, of the causeway.

We find four localities indicating the growth of apples, viz.:—Moyullaan, Moygalla, Gortnanool, and Drumullan ; while other growths are represented by one place only, namely—Clugga, vetches. There are three burial places—Calluragh, which means a pagan cemetery ; Killulla, having the same signification ; and Kilnasoolagh, the church or burial place of the religious people. Two fords are found,—one over the Shannon near Limerick, called Athlunkard (ath-an-longphort), ford of the stronghold, and Athnagore, ford of the horses or goats, near Six-mile-bridge.

As before stated, it was usual to bestow on localities names indicative of their shape, natural characteristics, and such like. We shall give a few more here, in addition to those already presented to the reader. Clonoughter, the upper meadow ; Reanabrone, marshy flat of the querns ; Ayleacutty, cliff of the small boat ; Boheraroan, the hairy man's road ; Caherscooby and Caherkine, the flat and the sunny cahirs, respectively ; Granaghan, the land of gravel ; Langough, the slender townland ; and Masnarylaan, the place where sports and games were held.

Certain townlands are called after animals and birds. These are:—Leamaneigh, horse leap ; Knockballynnameath, near Athlunkard bridge, named after stallions (meadach) ; Rosmadda, dog's meadow ; Muckinagh, pig feeding ; and Woodcockhill, cnoc-na-crabhar.

Only one waterfall occurs in the barony, to wit, Cloonanassa. The word *assa* in Irish signifies a waterfall.

As may be well believed, from the quarrelsome habits of our ancestors, there are place names indicative of battles and contentions. The barony of Bunratty, however, appears to have been unusually Quaker-like in its character, seeing that only three localities derive their names from fighting. These are—Ballinoosky (*Baile-an-fuasnadh*); Dromoland and Rathfolan (*fodhladh*, litigation).

A certain number of townlands in this, as in every other district of the county, are called after people who inhabited them in former times. These require no explanation, and we make no reference to them here.

In future numbers of this periodical we hope to give information similar to this, touching the other baronies of the County of Clare.

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