The Castle and Manor of Dromineer, Co. Tipperary.

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Five miles to the west of Nenagh and on the shore of Lough Derg the modern angler, tourist or pleasure seeker reaches the little village of Dromineer, dominated by the remains of its lofty Castle, built on a stone pier right on the edge of the water. The examination by Dr. Curtis of the large mass of medieval documents from the archives of Kilkenny Castle now being calendared for the first time and made available to the student, makes it possible to add something to the very little which has appeared in print regarding this locality (1). For the references to such of these papers as have not yet appeared in print, I am indebted to Dr. Curtis, who has provided me with abstracts, translations and general encouragement.

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Dromineer is situated in the Barony of Lower Ormond (2) and in the Civil Survey will be found given as a Parish united with the Parish of Musca (mod. Monsea) (3). The student should, however, note the highly interesting information in the description of the Lower Ormond bounds given by the Civil Survey, who there refer to Dromineer, Monsea and Nenagh as “The United Parishes of Nenagh, Musca and Dromineer, now known and commonly described by the name of Agha or Parish of Agha” (4). It is apparent that the name Dromineer originally was a separate Parish, and indeed it so appears in the early ecclesiastical taxations. It also had its own Parish Church, the remains of which, on the hillside to the left of the village, as one faces the lake, excited the curiosity of O’Donovan when he was engaged in his Ordnance Survey work in 1841, both on account of its great age and its structural details (5). O’Donovan (in the “Name Books”) gives the name derivation as Drui-an-ar or the “western ridge,” which the topography certainly seems to favour (6). The alternative is to refer the last two syllables to “inver” or the river mouth which is even more confirmed by the topography, since the north-eastern boundary of the Parish is formed by the Nenagh River from Ballygartella to the point where it empties itself into Lough Derg, a short distance to the east of the Castle (7).

There are not many materials available from which to reconstruct the very early history of this area. It is not mentioned by the Annalist, although its situation on the shores of Lough Derg must have made it known to and visited by both the Danes and the Dallassian Kings who so often sailed their fleets up the lake on their expeditions towards Conmacnoise and Athlone. In recent years some small finds of early implements and weapons have been made at and around Dromineer but nothing outstanding or in any quantity. On the southern arm of Dromineer Bay at Hazel Point (or Kilteelagh), however, is a very large earthen fort on the lake shore which must have been inhabited at an early period. O’Donovan who visited it in 1840 (8) says that it was known in his time as the “Meadow Fort” and that it is “one of the largest in Ireland.” He gives the measurements as 6½ chains from N. to S. and 8 chains from E. to W. and adds that the ring is capable of grazing three cows. Having regard to its situation, one would commend it as a suitable site for excavation.

When Theobald Walter and his Norman knights and followers came to Ormond at the beginning of the 13th century they commenced their settlement there by founding the Abbey of St. John at Tyone, Nenagh, in 1200 A.D. (9) and building the Castle at Nenagh about 1217 A.D. (10). An attempt was made—with temporary success—to colonise a great part of Lower Ormond and a smaller portion of Upper Ormond. This colonisation lasted until the middle of the 14th century when the Dallassian O’Briens and O’Kenevys succeeded in entirely overthrowing the Norman power and driving the colonists out of the two Baronies for nearly two centuries (11). In this early Norman incur-

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2. Lower Ormond with Upper Ormond was anciently the territory of Musca Thibre. See A.F.M. (O’D., 2nd Ed.), vol. 1, p. 106, and O’Flaherty, Ogygia, 111, c. 63.
4. Ibid, p. 89.
6. O’D., who often in different works gives different place name derivations, favours “the river’s mouth” in the O.S. Letters, and suggests that is is the Drum Inbhur of the Book of Lecan, Pedigree of Musca Thibre.
7. The Nenagh river, now so called, is described as the “River of Geagh” in the Civil Survey at all points in its course through the two Ormonds. Both O’Donovan and Hogan (Onomasticon) equate it with the “Owenagoffey” (O’D’s Note, A.F.M., p. 880) or the Ahainn Ua g-Cathbath of the Book of Glendalough (and see O’D’s note to Supp. of O’Reilly’s Dict., 581 and 582). It may be that the “Geagh” represents the best attempt of the Cromwellian Clerk to the Civil Survey jury to render the Irish name phonetically. The name of Lough Derg is said to be derived from the “red eye” of King Eochaidh, who lived between Scariff and Mountshannon, temp. 30 A.D., and who plucked out his eye at the request of Atrima, the Importante. Ollamh of King Conor Mac Nessa, who demanded it as a gift and afterwards threw it into the lake (Hardiean Mss. R.M. 2580 and Book of Leinster, 30 A.D.).
8. Name Books eit.
sion there is evidence that portion at least of the Parish of Dromineer was occupied by the invaders. In a Deed dated by Dr. Curtis in the period 1259-1283 Richard Talebot granted to Theobald Walter and his heirs lands “which Peter de Keylo formerly held at Locheryn and le Crennach which he had of the donation of the said Theobald.” Locheryn as a place name has disappeared, so far as I am aware, but on the evidence of an endorsement on the Deed itself “Locheryn apud Crennach, Ormond.” Dr. Curtis identifies the lands as in the modern townland of Cranagh in Monsea parish adjoining Dromineer. A more interesting record having regard to the later history of the Castle and Manor is the entry in the Escheators Return on the Pipe Roll, a.r. 12, Edwd. II. “Thomas de Cantwell owes 2l rent of three carruicates of land at Dromynwyrr for Easter term, XXVII., Edwd. 1” (12). The spelling is peculiar and suggests yet another meaning of the place name by reference to the Weir for fishing which was attached to the Manor and situate at a point on the river about threequarters of a mile from the lake at the place now known as “The Island,” where the remains of it are still to be seen (15).

For the two hundred years between 1350 and a short time prior to 1550, the two Ormonds were in Irish hands, and except for some passing references in the Annalists we have little to work on for their more intimate history. It is apparent, however, from papers hereafter to be quoted that during this period the Castle and Manor of Dromineer were in the hands of the O’Kennedys. It is apparent also that it was this great Ormond family who built the Castle but at what point of time is not so easy to determine. It was certainly built before 1553, as was the Castle of Ballyartella (now totally destroyed) for in that year (February 28th) a Notarial Deed in Latin was executed between Thomas Earl of Ormond (i.e. Thomas Duffe, the 10th Earl) on the one part, and Theodoric, son of Odo I Kynenegeh Donne and Eugene, his natural brother, of the other part, whereby Theodoric and Eugene granted to the Earl the “Town and Castle of Drominir” in exchange for the Castle of Ballyartela or the Castle of Dromainnehan (14). O’Donovan says Dromineer Castle is “not old” (15) giving as his reason the large quadrangular windows. The general strongly resembles Lemanigh Castle, in Co. Clare. The greater number of the O’Kennedy Castles appear to have been built in the 15th century, as were the comparable ones in Clare (16). This Castle of Dromineer is quite unlike any of the other Ormond Castles and certainly seems more modern in structure to the uninstructed eye, so that it may be dated with some considerable degree of confidence to the first half of the 16th century. The tradition ascribing its erection to the Butlers rather than the O’Kennedys can hardly stand the test of historical investigation, having regard to the foregoing.

During the period which followed the re-taking of Ormond by the Butlers, and up to the outbreak of the rebellion there in 1599, when the Ormond chiefs joined Redmond Burke, the “pretended Baron of Leitrim,” the relations between Earl Thomas of Ormond and the Irish native gentry were on the whole good. His sister-in-law was married to one of the O’Kennedys of Upper Ormond (17) and he during this period entered into many agreements and transactions concerning land with the other chief families who were freeholders. He made no attempt to re-colonise the country by force and, indeed, in only one or two instances did he re-introduce Norman freeholders at all —and that it would appear rather incidentally than of any set design. One of these latter cases, however, is at Dromineer. We have seen by the Deed of 1556 the two O’Kennedy brothers transferred their interest in the Castle and town to the Earl for valuable consideration. Apparently the Earl gave them Drominilane in pursuance of this Deed, for by a further Deed of September 7th, 1570, Dermot, son of Cornelius O’Kennedy of Drominemehan granted to Earl Thomas “all the Manors of Dromeynier.

14. Cal. Or. Deeds awaiting publication. In the Inquisition post mortem of James, the 5th Earl. However (see Exchequer Inq., Tipperary No. 1, 1st of Edward VI, Record Office), he is returned as having possessed “a castle, 10 messuages, 30 acres arable and 10 acres pasture at Dromerey—of no value, because waste—whereof Conor Moshane dispossessed the said James the Earl on 10th April, 37th Henr. VIII. (1546). It seems probable from this that Earl Piers, the 8th Earl, who had a grant of all the family property in Ormond from Thomas, the 7th Earl, had taken Dromineer from the O’Kennedys and that Earl James had lost it again. It was certainly in Irish hands up to the date of Piers accession in 1515.
15. O.S. Letters cit.
17. Cal. Or. Deeds awaiting publication. He was an O’Kennedy of Kilkenny.
Baliartelu, Annaghe, Ballycoman, Ballyimikine, Uskean, Drominehane, Ballyrourke-
more, Kilneleagh, Brittace, Cullage, Leghence, Dromod, Le Fie, Fiddane O’Clery, Car-
rice in Agha, Ballydrenane, Carriginn, Kiltiolo, and Gurtine, in Ormond. To him and
his Assigns for Ever.” By a complementary Deed of September 12th, 1570, the Earl re-
granted to Dermot O’Kennedy all the foregoing premises except Dromineer, Baliar-
tella, Annaghe, Ballycoman and Ballyimikine To Hold For Ever by ten shillings royal
service and an annual rent of £4, rendering suit at the Court of the Manor of Nenagh, etc.
The general effect of these two Deeds was to give to O’Kennedy a good title in English
law to such of the premises as he retained by virtue of the Deed of September 12th, and
to leave Dromineer and Ballyartella in the Earl’s hands by O’Kennedy’s grant of Septem-
ber 7. The Earl apparently let Dromineer to one Patrick Purcell as a tenant and on
the expiration of his tenancy set them to Thomas Cantwell of Cantwells Court, Co. Kilk-
enny, who on May 12, 1582, entered into a Bond with the Earl by way of tenancy
agreement to hold the lands “During the Earl’s pleasure as Patrick Purcell FitzThom-
拉斯 tenant thereof, held the same, excepting the Fishers Place there with the lands
belonging to the same” (19). The reference to the “Fishers Place and the lands belong-
ing to the same” is intriguing and we will return to it again. The Cantwells, of Cantwells
Court, were a family with intimate connections with the Ormond family right back to
the time of the first Theobald Walters when, as we have seen, another Thomas Cantwell
was tenant of Dromineer. A letter of the 10th Earl, dated in 1585, directing forbearance
to sue them for livery, recites that they “were always wards of the Earl” (19). Thomas
Cantwell continued as tenant of Dromineer Castle and Manor to the Earl up to 1597.
During this period he at least lived there for portion of the time, for we find him on the
4th March, 1592, acting as one of the Earl’s Commissioners in an Inquisition taken on
that date at the Manor of Nenagh (20). On May 17, 1597, the Earl by Deed of that
date granted to him “the Manor of Dromyn in Lower Ormond, also the towns of
Annagh, Castlemene, Carriginn, Carrick, and half Ballydrenane, containing 5 ploughlands
of the measure of Lower Ormond, with the Castle, Bawn, messuages, etc., reserving to the
Earl the use of the Castle, Bawn, hall, and other houses for dwelling or for the defence
of the country—To hold For Ever to him and his heirs, male, with reversion to the Earl
and his heirs at the annual rent of £5 6s. 8d.” There was a further provision “that the
said Thomas shall attend with the inhabitants and freeholders of the Earl for all rode
and journeys and general hostings as heretofore,” and the further most interesting
proviso “That all the fishermen now dwelling or hereafter to dwell at Dromenyre afore-
said shall from time to time and at all times when they or any of them shall be there-
unto required by the said Earl or by his heirs, etc., fish for the provision and house of
the said Earl and his said heirs at the river Shannon near Dromenyre, and that the said
Thomas and his first male shall send the said fish unto the said Earl and his heirs at
his own proper costs and charges” (21). By a further Indenture of May 31, 1597, Thomas
Cantwell agreed further to pay the chief rent called the Mait Earla on the above pre-
mises. This latter rent was rent in kind, which had been fixed on Ormond by the
first Butlers in the original occupation (22). This Deed completes the documents avail-
able dealing with Dromineer Castle and Manor up to the time of the Civil Survey in 1653,
when John Cantwell of Cantwells Court, Irish Papist, the son or grandson of Thomas,
will be found in possession as a freeholder (23) of all the premises comprised in this
Deed, which are all comprehensively gathered together and described as “The Manor of
Dromineer, 2 ploughlands, Aghbeg and Kiltiolo one pld., Carriginn, Carrig and Bally-
drenane, two ploughlands, one quarter and two-thirds of a quarter of a ploughland”—
the whole containing 1,200 acres, plantation measure, of which 600 were arable, 70 meadow,
100 pasture, 370 shrubby wood, 30 rocky lands, and 30 Red Bogg, and whole valued by
the contemporary computation of £70. The Civil Survey proceeds to describe the
holding as follows:—“The said Manor and lands being in one continent, are

18 Cal. Or. Deeds awaiting publication.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Cal. Or. Deeds awaiting publication.
22 See Cal. Or. Deeds, vol. 3 ref. the “Rent of Cowes” from Ormond. It subsequently became a
money payment.
bounded on the North with the River of Shannon, on the West with the three ploughlands of Tomonyne, in the Psh. of Musea, the plowland of Karhu and the 2 plowlands of Musea, in the South with the lands of Musea aforesaid, the pl. of Ballycomane, in said Parlish, and on the East with the River of Geagh, whereon stands a fishing weir belonging to the said Manor. To the Said Manor appertaineth a Courte Leete and Court Baron with all the rights, privileges and immunities belonging to a Manor.”

I have marked the parcels of the Manor on the annexed tracing from the Down Survey Barony Map of Lower Ormond (Parish of Domineer).

In the interval between the grant from the Earl to Thomas Cantwell in 1597 and the Cromwell confiscations of 1653, had taken place the Tyrone rebellion of 1608-1603, in which many of the chief Irish gentlemen of Ormond were killed or executed, and the rebellion of 1641. In neither of these was Dromineer involved—the Cantwells having apparently stood on the side of the Government and their patrons, the Earls of Ormond. In the interval between these two events an elaborate scheme was prepared, first in the reign of James I. and later by Strafford, in the reign of Charles I., to plant the two Ormonds after the manner of the plantation of Leix and Offaly, in the reign of Philip and Mary. Prendergast and Butler who wrote regarding this project (24) seem to have missed an interesting State Paper. This is a memorandum setting out the proposed steps in great detail (25). Amongst a great many other suggestions it was proposed to build three towns in North Tipperary to secure the plantation after the manner, apparently, of Maryborough and Philipstown. One of these towns was to be built in Ara, “a great continent which hath not an English jury in it, nor an English freeholder—scarce an Englishman.” The second town was to be built in Ormond on the Shannon and though Dromineer is not mentioned, if the project had fructified there is no doubt that it is here the new town would have been built. The third was to have been built “in the centre of Ormond,” from which we may with reason infer that Nenagh as a centre of population, apart from its Castle, had little existence, the which is confirmed by the Civil Survey description of it as containing “sixty cottages and thatched houses lately built” (26). The execution of Strafford brought this plantation to naught after it had been in the air for nearly twenty years, and so amongst other results Dromineer remained unbuilt as a town in our modern sense.

In the Cromwellian wars Dromineer sustained its first and only siege. It was held, apparently, for the Earl of Ormond when Ireton captured Nenagh Castle (27) from Sir George Hamilton, Ormond’s brother-in-law on 29th October, 1650. Incidentally Sir George was not hanged from the top window as mentioned in many authorities, but was allowed to march away with his arms and lived for over thirty years afterwards. After taking Nenagh Ireton sent a party to Dromineer “where there was a lieutenant and 50 men.” No strenuous resistance seems to have been offered and the Castle was taken and garrisoned. Continuing along the Lake shore, “we also took Castletown Arra and some other places thereabouts.” So begins and ends the only record of Dromineer Castle having been “in the Wars.”

In the Cromwellian Confiscations and the Acts of Settlement and Explanation which followed, as one would have expected, the Earl of Ormond (now James 1st, Duke and Lord Lieutenant) claimed Dromineer as chief lord of the Manor, as he did Nenagh and other places in Ormond. In fact, he did recover the greater portion of it as held up to 1653 by John Cantwell, Irish Papist, who disappears into the oblivion created by the Four Courts explosion of 1922. Of the 1200 acres comprising the Manor the Duke had a total of 635 in Dromineer, Carrig and Ballydrenane, given back to him on the Restoration, in addition to a large holding of 556 acres which John Cantwell had held, now entered in Tomonyne (28). For the rest, Joseph Fox had 196 acres in Aghbog and Kilteelogg and Nicholas White 106 acres in Carrigine. Fox was a soldier and White (Sir Nicholas, of Leixlip, Co. Kildare), who had had a small holding in Ormond before the confiscation, succeeded in doubling it by court influence and the exercise of the type of wire-pulling of which that period of Irish history provides so many superlative examples, in alleged

24. Opera cit. See Note 11.
27. “Diary of a Parliamentary Officer” (T.C.D. Mss.) See also Ludlow’s “Memoirs.”
"reprises" for lands lost elsewhere. In the Hearth Money Rolls for 1665 we find John Parker in residence at Dromineer Castle, paying tax for three hearths (29). He was an agent or employee of the first Duke, and he appears to have remained in possession as such a short time after the great Duke's death, for we find his son writing to the second Duke from Nenagh on August 2nd, 1658, supplanting an office in his Grace's Palatinate, and saying that his (the writer's) father lay sick at his Grace's Castle at Dromineer, and that he feared that the news of the death of his Grace's grandfather (the great Duke) would prove fatal to him and that he would in a short time leave this world to attend his dear Lord of Ormond in the next (30). Most of the property of the second Duke in the two Ormond Baronies was sold in the first decade of the 18th century under statutory powers to enable the debts of the first Duke to be paid. Nenagh was sold at this time (1703) to Chief Baron Donnellan, whose son later sold it to the Holmes family, who still hold the greater part of it. I have not found so far the record of the sale of Dromineer, but it seems clear that the old Castle fell into disuse at the end of the 17th century, when so many of the castles (including Nenagh) were partially demolished by Order of the Williamite government (31).

We may conclude this brief note with a reference to the "Fishers Place" mentioned in the 16th century Deeds already quoted. The exact location is not stated but in the Petty Barony Map of the Down Survey a small strip will be found enclosed along by the bank of the river extending from the mouth of it up to the "fishying weir" and marked "C" by Dr. Raggett, the Petty Surveyor. There is no direct reference to this identification letter in either of my copies of the Books of Survey and Distribution, but as it is clear from the Deeds that the "Place" was within the Manor bounds and close to the Shannon, and as this plot has its inland termination at the weir, it is reasonable to conclude that it was the mensal land of the fisherman of the Earls and Dukes of Ormond. Modern anglers may be interested in the account of the fishing at Lough Derg given by Arthur Young, who visited the Holmes family at Johnstown on September 29th, 1777 (32). He says of the Shannon about Dromineer: "Pikes swarm in it and rise to the weight of 50 lbs. In the little flat spaces on its banks are small but deep loughs, which are covered in winter and in floods; when the river withdraws it leaves plenty of fish in them." He adds that in Johnstown Lake a "towing rod" gets you a bite in a moment of a pike "from 20 to 40 lbs," and adds that he eat "of" one 27 lbs. which was so taken. He also saw a fisherman bring in three trout weighing 14 lbs., which he sold for sixpence halfpenny each, and that a couple of boats lying at anchor "with lines extended from one to the other" and "hooks in plenty from them" have been known to catch an "incredible" quantity of trout. Colonel Prittie one morning caught 32 trout weighing 4 stone odd pounds, and the average weight was from three to nine pounds. He also mentions perch (which he says came for the first time "ten years ago"), bream, gillaroos "up to 12 lbs," and eels. Young can hardly have himself been an angler or he would not have thought that cross line fishing was done by boats "at anchor."

A final note of a tentative kind on the place names: Dromineer itself has been already dealt with. Of the other names within the Manor lands Aghbeg appears here and there (see Deeds ante) in its modern form, Annaghbeg. It is now held largely by the Minnt family, who came there by purchase in the 18th century from the Co. Limerick. Fox, the grantee under the Acts of Settlement in the reign of Charles II, was a noted Cromwellian officer and his name is the fourth appended to the list of Cromwellian notables who presented an address to the great Duke of Ormond, dated at Nenagh in 1651 for his efforts in quashing the proposed "Commission of Inquiry" into the land settlement which the King had promised Col. Richard Talbot, of the old Catholic interest (33). One of the family Ceelee Minnt was murdered at Duhaarla in the early 18th century as a sequel to a romantic affair with a Miss Parker and is interred at Khigh (34).

29. Hearth Money Rolls of Tipperary (Ed. Laffan), p. 52. The names of about twenty other residents of Dromineer will also be found in this record. Surprisingly there are no McGraths, the most common name there now.


O’Donovan notes that in 1841 the North side of Dromineer near the river was called “the Callows,” and the south and west side “Dromineer or Crushteen,” and Launagore. The latter name still remains and is translated by O’Donovan as the “crane’s island.” He mentions two standing stones in Garryduff (the “black garden”). Connaught Bay (now called Barrack Bay) and Connaught Point were so called because Lieut. Bayly, R.N., who lived at Hazel Point in 1841 and was the first man to navigate the Shannon by steam, allowed the Connaught men to land their turf there. Hobbins Island is so called because a man of that name was drowned there. Killawn, O’Donovan rather surprisingly translates as “underwood.”