MISCELLANEA

The Original City Arms?

The Arms employed by the City Council today consist of two towers separated by a gate with a raised portcullis, and a dome above, surmounted by a cross. This is usually interpreted as a representation of the main twin-towered gateway of King John's Castle. If so, then it is architecturally incorrect. There is no indication in the surviving structure of the castle to indicate that there ever was a dome over the entrance passage and, to the present writer's knowledge, there is no example of such a configuration in castle architecture. There is a second version of the arms that was used concurrently with the dome; it has a gabled roof in place of the dome and a pennant flying from a flagpole in place of the cross. This alternative makes perfect sense architecturally and, of the two, should be the preferred version. In her article on the Arms, Judith Hill has traced their history and notes a third version with neither dome nor gable. She also observes that the earliest known representation, on a seal of George I, uses the dome version.[1]

A debate over the correct arms raged around the time that Lenihan was about to produce his History of Limerick. It consisted of an exchange of letters in the *Limerick Chronicle* between the 11 December 1865 and 9 January 1866. The initiator of the debate, 'Archaiologist', equated the dome with Islamic culture and quoted Fitzgerald and McGregor's description of the arms, 'The arms of the city of Limerick are- argent, a castle, triple towered, the central tower of a conical shape, terminated with a flag-staff, bearing the British Ensign.'[2] In response 'Limericensis', states that the flag 'was an innovation introduced in modern times in a spirit of loyal flunkeyism'. There are in fact several different flags used in the various versions.

Among the depictions discussed in the exchange is one on a carved stone that was then at Plassey Mill. The stone had originally been set into Mungret Gate, but following demolition of the gate it laid among the rubble for some time before being taken to Plassey.[3] Denis Leonard of Limerick Civic Trust has recently recovered the stone and it is currently in the yard to the rear of the Trust's headquarters in the Bishop's Palace (Fig 1). Unfortunately the stone is now incomplete.

Fig.1 The Mungret Gate Stone in its new location.

[1] Judith Hill, 'The Use of the Castle of Limerick; Seal and City Motif' in David Lee (ed.), *Remembering Limerick* (Limerick, 1997) pp 335-47.

[2] This is a slightly edited version of what is to be found on p. 623 of Volume II of their *The History, Topography and Antiquities of the County and City of Limerick* (Dublin, 1827).

[3] Maurice Lenihan, *Limerick, Its History and Antiquities* (Limerick, 1866) p. 756.

Lenihan became caught up in this controversy over the arms to the extent that he had to correct the image of the Mungret Gate stone in his main text (Fig. 2) with a second version in the appendices (Fig. 3).[4] Clearly the debate forced him to go out to Plassey to have another look at the stone. He also states that the figure 'bears no resemblance whatever to any representation of the City Arms that have ever been recognised as such.' This definitive statement is very interesting because he continues by referring to the description of the stone in Dingley's *Tour Through Ireland*, written c.1680, which was being published about the same time.[5]
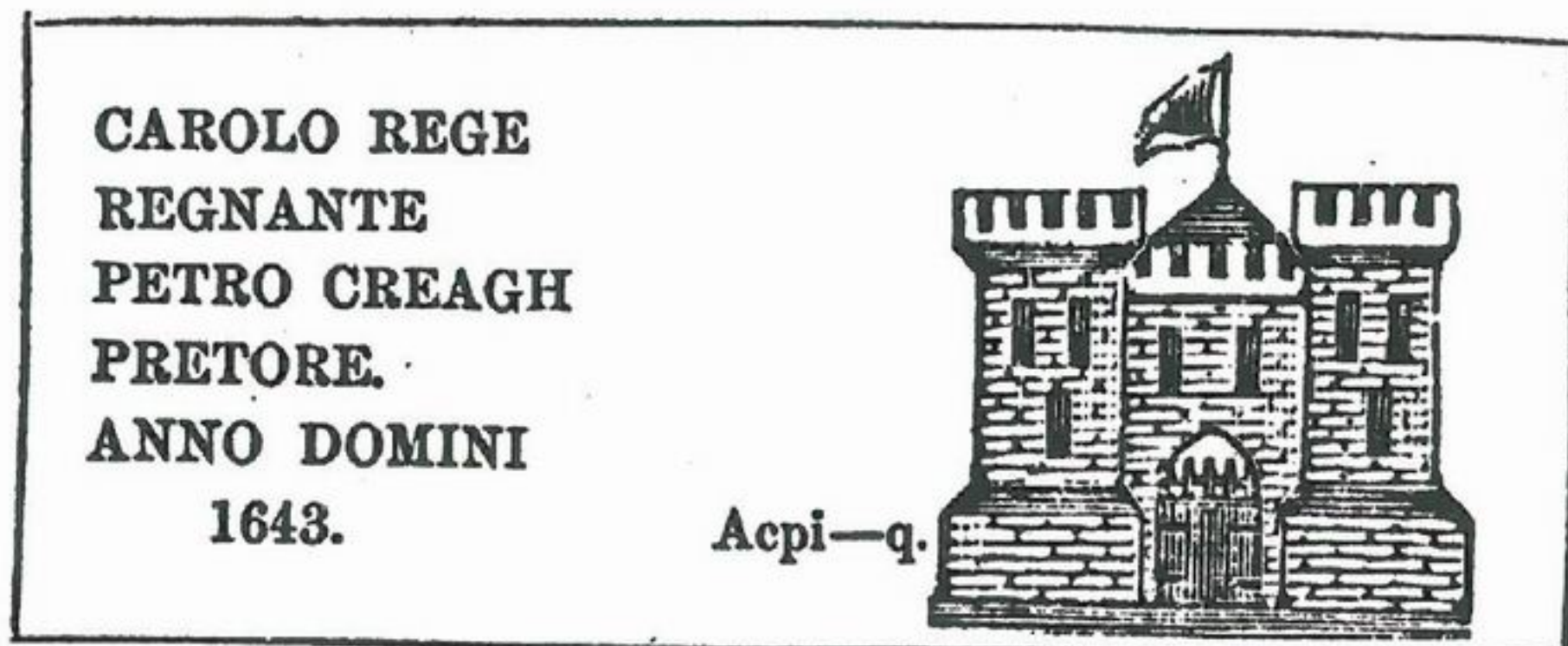

Fig. 2 Woodcut of the Mungret Gate Stone in Lenihan's *History*, p. 152.

Fig. 3 The revised version of Fig 2 in Lenihan, p.756.

[4] Ibid., pp 152 & 756

[5] The original manuscript is National Library MS392, p. 126; the published version, edited by E.P Shirley, is *JRSAI*, vol. v (NS), (1864-6), p. 427fn. & p. 430. In the Library it is catalogued under Dingley, but in the published version the author's name is given as Dineley.

The relevant section of Dingley's original journal is reproduced here as Fig. 4. It shows the three towers repeated on either side of the inscription:

CAROLO REGE

REGNANTE

PETRO CREAGH PRÆTORE

ANNO DNI

1643

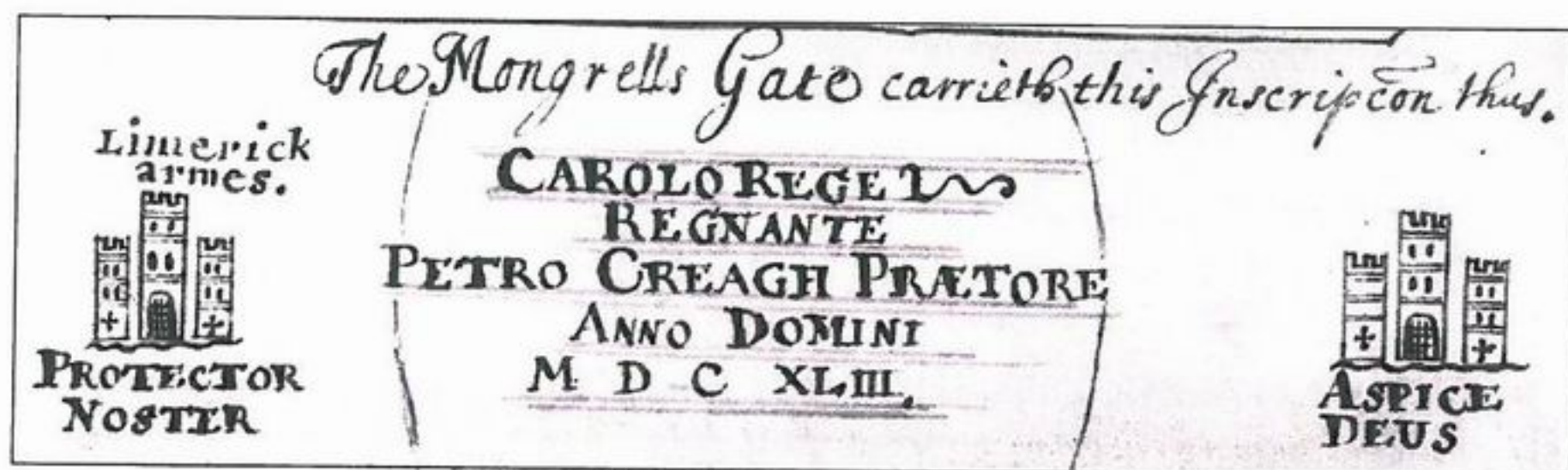(In the reign of King Charles, Piers Creagh Mayor, A.D. 1643)

Fig. 4 Drawing of the Mungret Gate Stone from Dingley's *Tour of Ireland* (Courtesy of the Board of the National Library).

Over the now missing left hand depiction are the words, 'Limerick/Armes'. Clearly Lenihan's assertion about the stone is quite incorrect. It is in fact the only known early image with an explicit statement attached to it that these are the arms. What is difficult to comprehend is that Lenihan also provided the footnotes for the published version of Dingley, and discusses the very stone, yet omits discussion of the statement that it bears the city arms. One's first assumption is that Lenihan deliberately tried to suppress the truth but, on reflection, this is unlikely because the truth is there for all to see in the published work. In all probability he got an incomplete copy of the journal to comment on.

In the depiction on the original stone, the central tower is taller than the other two and has a central entrance with a raised portcullis. It is quite obviously a perspective view of a single gate-tower with two other towers further away on a circuit of walls, an impression which is enhanced by the string-course across the front of the tower that drops away either side to the narrower and smaller flanking towers. So, if it is a depiction of a Limerick structure, then it cannot be the twin-towered castle gate. Most probably it is the gatehouse at the northern end of Baal's bridge, which is known from cartographic sources to have been a single tower. This was the original main entrance into the city. As such it was the most important gate in the city walls and thereby the one most likely to be chosen to depict the town. The only other possibility, the gate at the end of Thomond Bridge, is unlikely because it opened into the northern suburb and not the city proper.[6]

In conclusion, therefore, it has to be said that the earliest known arms of the City are not the ones in use today. The means by which such a change came about are not known. It is possible

6 The division of the walled area of Limerick into three sections, the City and the north and south suburbs is to be found in the 1654 *Civil Survey* of Limerick (ed., R. C. Simington,, Dublin, 1938).

that it arose in error, such as happened with Lenihan. It would appear that the change occurred in the latter part of the 17th or early 18th century, the first modern representation being on the city seal of George I. The date on the Mungret Gate stone is 1643, well before the five-year suspension of corporate government under Cromwell. It may well be that with the restoration of the corporation, run by a body of men new to Limerick, there was a revamping or reinterpretation of the city arms.

Brian Hodkinson

Milestones On The Dublin Road, Limerick

A milestone, probably put in place during the late eighteenth or the early nineteenth century, still survives, in a rather distressed condition, on the Dublin Road (Fig.1) It is situated on the footpath, beside the wall which runs in front of the row of houses known as Elsinore. The stone, which is 38 inches (96-7 millimetres) in height and carved from limestone, is not marked on the Ordnance Survey City Series, Limerick street map, but if ever it is inserted, it belongs in section 12D.

Fig. 1
According to the information on the milestone, it is situated two miles from Limerick and eighteen miles from Nenagh. A large chunk has been knocked from the lower part of the stone; the h is missing from the name of Nenagh and the L and k are missing from Limerick's name (Fig. 2).The top has also become a little worn and weathered. A benchmark was carved on its east face by the Ordnance Survey. This consists of three strokes, shaped like an arrowhead, with a fourth stroke across the top (Fig. 3).The function of a benchmark is to provide an accurate measurement of the site above sea level.[1]

[1] I am grateful to Brian Hodkinson for this information.

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

According to local memory the stone has always stood in its present position.[2] This contention would appear to be borne out by reference to Maps of the Roads of Ireland, Surveyed 1777, by Taylor and Skinner.[3] On the Dublin to Limerick map, there is a spot numbered 92 which appears to be approximately where the milestone is situated (Fig. 4). The index of the book states that it is 94 Irish miles from Dublin Castle to the Market House in Limerick.[4] This would support the view that position of the milestone is marked on this late eighteenth century map as there were 2240 yards in the Irish mile, while the English mile still consists of 1760 yards.

2 Mr. Ged 0'Dwyer, The Hurlers, Castletroy and Mr. Tom Toomey, Ballyclough, Annacotty.

3 Taylor and Skinner, Maps of the Roads of Ireland Surveyed 1777, (London and Dublin, 1778), p.99, Limerick City Museum.
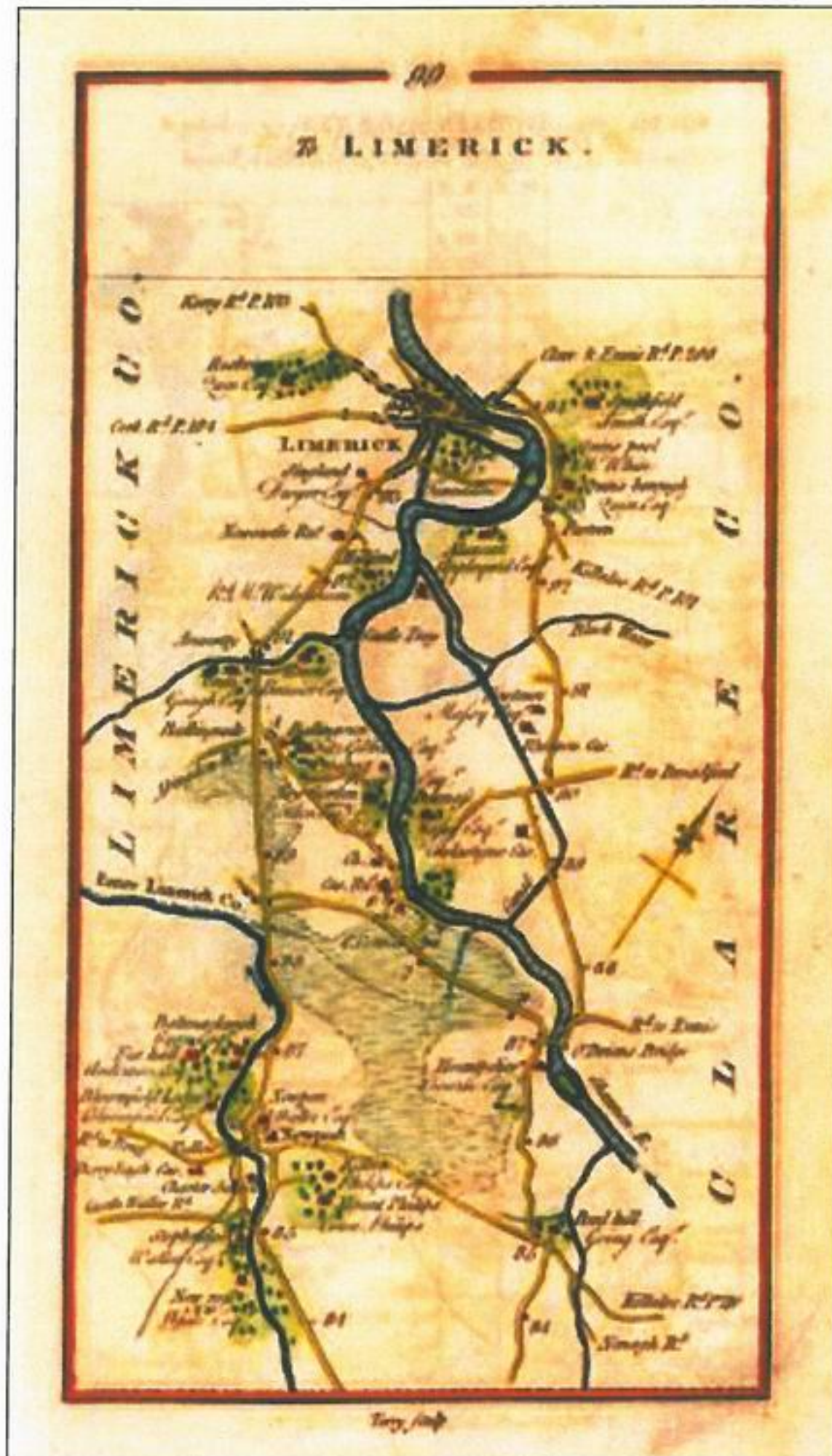
4 Ibid., p. vii.

Fig. 4

Another milestone, which is situated in front of a garden wall on the Dublin Road, opposite the car park of the Parkway Shopping Centre, has been brought to my attention by Brian Hodkinson, Limerick City Museum (Fig. 5). Again there is no reference to this stone on the Ordnance Survey City Series Limerick street map but it belongs in section 9D.   It is 26 inches (66 millimetres) in height and although it has been painted white, it also seems to be carved from limestone. Its upper section has suffered a lot from weathering and the ravages of time. On its west face Nenag 19 can be made out but the h of Nenagh is missing. The east face is virtually impossible to decipher. The number 93 on the Dublin to Limerick map produced by Taylor and Skinner can be found at approximately the place where this milestone is to be found.

Fig. 5

A road existed from Limerick to Dublin before 1737 because in that year an act was passed, which levied tolls:

> ...for repairing the High Road leading from the Town of Tomivarah in the
> County of Tipperary to the Town of Silver-mines, as also to the Town of
> Nenagh, and from the said Towns of Nenagh and Silver-mines by
> Shally-Orchard through the Town of Tullo in the said County to the City of
> Limerick.[5]

From Toomevara the road continued by Mountrath, Naas and Kildare to Dublin. As the above quotation makes clear, during the eighteenth century, the route did not follow the present one through Birdhill to Nenagh. Tullo was the old name for the town of Newport. The above line of road through Newport was the main Dublin to Limerick connection as late as 1806. John Carr, who travelled in the south and west of Ireland in the early years of the nineteenth century, wrote that the road from Roscrea to the neighbourhood of Limerick was dreary, but a few miles from Newport the scenery became more beautiful and was 'enlivened by elegant villas.'[6]

On what until recently was the main road through the outskirts of Limerick to Dublin, there is an old, abandoned toll house between the Parkway Shopping Centre and Dromroe (Fig. 6). On the Ordnance Survey City Series, Limerick street map, it should be in section 10D. Its irregular windows and very thick walls would seem to place its date of construction to the late eighteenth

[5] Statutes at Large, 11 George II, c. 18.

[6] John Carr, The Stranger in Ireland or a Tour in the Southern and Western Parts of that Country in 1805, (London, 1806)

or early nineteenth century. This toll house and the two milestones under discussion are shown on Sites and Monument Record Constraint Map, Archaeological Survey of Ireland.[7]

Fig. 6

Charlotte Murphy

Acknowledgments

Slieve Felim and Mauherslieve (a further note)

I would like to briefly comment on Paul Tempan's article, in the last volume of your journal (*NMAJ* vol. 46, 2006, pp 119—25), on the mountain names of Slieve Felim and Mauherslieve.

Firstly, there is a number of lacunae in his account of Slieve Felim: The historical evidence for Slievefelim Mountains / Sliabh Eibhlinne, including most of the examples cited by Paul Tempan and some other examples, was previously published by the Placenames Branch in, *Logainmneacha na hEireann I: Contae Luimnigh* (editor Art Ó Maolfabhail, 1990). The aforementioned book referred to two important articles by T.F. O'Rahilly in which he discussed the origin and development of the name (see *Ériu*, volume 13, p. 130 and volume 14, pp 3-4 especially).

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[7] Sites and Monuments Record Constraint Maps, Archaeological Survey of Ireland, Sheet No.5, Limerick City Museum.

Secondly, the derivation of Mauherslieve from *Mothar S(h)léibhe / Mothar an tSléibhe, as suggested by Mr. Tempan, is unlikely. The Irish form which the

Placenames Branch recommended in *Liostaí Logainmneacha: Contae Thiobraid Árann,* namely Máthair Shléibhe, was based not only on the evidence of the Ordnance Survey Namebook (as presented by Mr. Tempan in his article), but also on an earlier example of the name recorded in 1654 in the *Civil Survey: County of Tipperary* (volume ii, p. 136), i.e. Maherthea (leg. Mahertlea?) and, furthermore, on the local pronunciation which we recorded about 1990. The pronunciation of the name (at that time) had a low, back, short vowel in the initial syllable (similar to that found in the initial syllable of Irish carraig, for instance). Original long vowels of Irish placenames are often shortened by English speakers in syllables preceding the primary stress, as is illustrated by the short or reduced vowels in the initial syllables of the following Tipperary placenames, Athassel (Irish Áth Iseal), Clonoulty (Cluain Abhla), Donohill (Dún Eochaille), Donaskeagh (Dún na Sciach). Therefore, *Máthair Shléibhe, with short initial syllable, is in keeping with this pattern. I accept, as Mr. Tempan noted, that the dearth of early references makes it difficult to interpret the name.

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Paul Templan replies:
I am grateful to Dr. Pádraig Ó Cearbhaill for pointing out the need for references to *Logainmneacha na hÉireann I* and the two articles by T.F. O'Rahilly in my article on Slieve Felim and Mauherslieve. The former was cited in my article, though it should have been mentioned along with Hogan's *Onomasticon Goedelicum* as an important source of the historical evidence for Slieve Felim / *Sliabh Eibhlinne,* and I offer my apologies to An Brainse Logainmneacha for this omission.

However, I would like to emphasise that my primary aim in dealing with Slieve Felim / *Sliabh Eibhlinne* was not to revisit the origins and meaning of the name, but rather to raise some new issues which have not previously been resolved or tackled at all, particularly the location and extent of the landscape feature referred to and the re-interpretation of the name through time. Therefore, the points that I made still stand in spite of these omitted references.

Regarding Mauherslieve, I am grateful to Dr. Ó Cearbhaill for providing the 1654 form from the *Civil Survey,* and I agree that this points towards the second element being *sliabh.* I take on board the phonological reasons he presents for interpreting the first element as *máthair* rather than *mothar,* but the existence in certain local pronunciations of a short low back vowel like the first *a* in *carraig* could equally be due to factors other than vowel shortening, such as the simple interplay of *a* and *o,* a common enough phenomenon, or the influence of another word, such as the surname Maher. However, the major difficulty with the interpretation *Máthair Shléibhe* is a semantic one: what idea might those who conferred such a name on this peak (apparently meaning 'mother of mountain') have intended to convey? And why would *máthair* be used in first position in this name? It is very rare as a generic in Irish place-names and interpretations involving it therefore require special justification. While there may well be others, I am aware of it in only one name: *Máthair an Fhiaigh,* 'mother of the raven', the name of a coastal rock near Sybil Head in Co. Kerry, and here it can be explained by the presence of another rocky island nearby called *An Fiach.* A different explanation would be required in land-locked Tipperary. I am open to persuasion.

Finally, I would like to congratulate Dr. Ó Cearbhaill on the publication in 2007 of his excellent volume *Logainmneacha na hÉireann II* on the *cill* names of Co. Tipperary.

Paul Tempan
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