Claire and its Disputed Location

DIARMUID Ó MURCHADHA

Claire or Sliabh Claire is a mountainous district in the barony of Coshlea in east Limerick. It is so named in a ninth-century Life of Patrick and in several other Old and Middle Irish sources. Due to some ambivalence in the writings of John O’Donovan on its exact location, a dispute arose in the early-twentieth century between the Limerick antiquarians T.J. Westropp, who placed Claire in Ballingarry (Glenbrohane) parish, and P.J. Lynch, who maintained it lay in Duntryleague in the parish of Galbally. The author suggests that Westropp was correct.

Folamastar fedlugud hi tóich Chláire oc ráith Choirpri Ri Broccán ní relgd dó ... Asbert Pátraic robhad leis iar taín, forácaib for dia muintir iar n-aímsr moir i. Coemán Célit Rath. (He desired to remain beside Clár [Claire] at the rath of Corbre and Broccán, and this was not permitted to him ... Patrick said that [the place] would belong to him afterwards, and after a long time he left a man of his household there, namely, Coemán of Cella Rath).¹

The legendary occurrence so described in the ninth-century vernacular Life of Patrick (known as the Tripartite Life) is not found in the earlier Latin Lives in the Book of Armagh, but it is prefigured in the notulae or preparatory notes therein, as follows (no. 53): Tuad(mum) Clare Corpiri Broccan +. Coimán Cell Rath.² All the place and personal names in that section correspond with those in the Tripartite Life. Colgan based his seventeenth-century Life of Patrick on this source, and in respect of Coemamus de Kill-ratha, wrote as follows: ‘Ecclesia hic Kill-ratha dicit videtur esse locus, qui supra eodem cap. Rath-Corbre, a Garbre cuibus stirps ibi fertur Patricio restituisse, ut videtur, appellatur’. (‘This church of Kill-ratha referred to seems to be the place which beforehand was called Rath-Corbre from Garbre [i.e. Cairbre], whose lineage, it is said, resisted Patrick there.’)³ Archdall commented that ‘[Roger] O’Flaherty in his manuscript notes on Colgan, positively says that Kilrath is now to be found near the mountain called Claire in the territory of Ara-cliaich in Co. Limerick’.⁴ As neither Colgan nor O’Flaherty was familiar with the area, their testimony has to be treated with caution, particularly as Colgan depends so much on videtur. He himself seems to have misread the church name, which contains two genitive plurals: Coemán Cell Ráth means ‘Coemán of the churches (or cells) of the raths’. O’Flaherty’s Ara-cliaich is reasonably accurate, however; Patrick’s next wish was to reside i Gréin la Aradh, i.e. in the parish of Grean, and afterwards

² L. Bieder (ed.), The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh (Dublin, 1979) p. 182. (The letters in italics are editorial additions). P. O Reain, in his forthcoming Dictionary of Irish saints, describes the Notulae as ‘serving as a blueprint for a new Life of the saint, the so-called “Tripartite Life”, which brought him to all four provinces, including Munster’.
³ J. Colgan, Trias Thesmatuarta (Louvain, 1647; repr. Dublin, 1997) p. 186 (n. 68).
⁵ Bethu Phdraic, I, 2361.
with the Araidh in the adjoining parish of Kilteely (la Aradu Cliath oc Teidiul). Both parishes and several others in east Limerick are in Emly diocese, which seems to have been approximately coterminous with the ancient Cliú.

The origin of the dispute over where exactly Cláire was can be traced to the work of one scholar. John O’Donovan was undoubtedly the recognized mid-nineteenth-century expert in all branches of Irish language scholarship, especially toponymy, and his pronouncements in that field were usually adopted by his fellow-scholars. So his identifications – unfortunately, more than one appeared – are of particular interest. In the course of his work with the Ordnance Survey O’Donovan visited most areas of the country, writing copious letters on the various parishes and their monuments for the information of the officials in Dublin. Those which concern us were written during his travels in the barony of Coshlea (Cois iSlíbhe) in the south-east of Co. Limerick in July-August, 1840. Having visited the parish of Emlygrennan he wrote:

In the townland of Ballin an Bhruighne (Ballinvreena) in this parish is situated the Well of Ceann Mór, which is celebrated in Irish Romances about the Magician, Mogh Ruith ... near the road on the boundary between the parishes of Emlygrennan and Glenbrohaun and is the head of a stream called Sruath Cheanmhoir [sic, ? recte Cheannmhóir]. The mountain from the North face of which the stream gushes is that called Cenn Claire in the Irish annals, as I shall prove when treating of the parish of Knockainy. Now this name is lost and the mountain is called Sliabh Riach or the Grey Mountain.

When researching placenames, O’Donovan’s familiarity with the early sagas proved greatly to his advantage, and he must have been pleased at being able to connect these sites with the legend of Forbuis Droma Damghaire (The Siege of Knocklong), which was centred on the area. Briefly, the story recounts an invasion of Munster by Cormac mac Airt, king of Tara, in order to force tribute from the Munstermen. His army marched south and encamped on a hill called Cnoc na Ceann which they renamed Drum Damghaire. On it they erected a ship-shaped timber-framed tent and that provided

---

6 Ibid., l. 2374.
7 No barony is named from Cliú since much of that territory in east Limerick and west Tipperary was granted to the Norman William de Burgh, after whose descendants the baronies of Clanwilliam are called. See D.G. Merrane, Land and settlement: a history of east Tipperary to 1660 (Tipperary, 2003) pp 2-3.
8 Ordnance Survey Letters, Limerick i, 63 (209). But in his account of Knockainy parish (OS Lett. Limerick i, 77 (257)) O’Donovan wrote: ‘Cenn Abhart Sliabh Cain ... is now the mountain called Sliabh Riach’. (The pagination in brackets is that of the original manuscript; the other (i, 63) is that of Fr Michael O’Flanagan’s typescript copy bound in volumes. The set of the latter used in this article (Letters and Name Books) is that in Special Collections, Beoile Library, University College Cork, likewise the 6th Ordnance Survey maps from the original 1841 edition; the more recent 1928 edition is sometimes adverted to).
10 The placenames in these sentences are to be found in FDD, §§ 38-40; Drum Damghaire appears to have been borrowed from the earlier Bórama saga, where it is connected with St Moling’s Ros Brúc (now St Mullin’s) on the Barrow in Co. Carlow. (See Drums naDùin Drums naDamghaire in R.I. Best, M.A. O’Brien, A. O’Sullivan (eds), The Book of Leinster, formerly Lebor na Nuachongbhlí (5 vols, Dublin, 1967-83) (henceforth LL), l. 38765. The term damghaire (‘stagg-long’) is also associated with Ros Brúc in a poem ascribed to St Moling: Ceol na pa go psalningne / i Find Ruis Brúc/ cen cibhain / dorain damh darin damghaire (O.J. Bergin, R.I. Best, R. Meyer, J.G. O’Keeffe (eds), Anceadta from Irish manuscripts (5 vols, Halle, 1913) ii, 24). But the compiler of FDD altered the word to damghaire, denoting ‘assembly-shout’, making reference to the large gatherings and the clamour on the ridge.
them with another name, Long Chliach, 'the ship of Cluá'. As the parishes of Ballingarry and Knocklong adjoin one another in the barony of Coshlea, Cormac's army would be clearly visible from 'Slievereagh', just three miles to the south, where the Munster encampment was at Cláire, a residence of Fiacha Muillethan, king of Munster. When Cormac's demands were refused, his druids inflicted great hardships on the Munstermen, including the drying up of all their wells. In great distress, Fiacha sent to Inis Dairbhre (now Valencia Island, Co. Kerry) for the most powerful Munster druid, Mogh Ruith, who, after he arrived on Sliabh Cim Chláire, cast a spear and ordered his tents to find the spot where it landed and where the water would gush out. When the assistant, whose name was Cennmór ('Bighead'), asked what reward would be given him, he was told that the stream would be named after him. With their water and food supplies restored, and aided by Mogh Ruith's spells, the Munstermen easily routed Cormac's army.

So we can imagine O'Donovan's satisfaction on discovering that about a mile and a half from the peak he had equated with Ceann Cláire there was a spring well, known locally as 'Tubercanavore' (Tobar Ceanna Mhóir), with a stream flowing out of it called 'Cannavore Stream'. On the map (OS 6" Limerick 48) the well is shown in a section of Glenbrohane townland called 'Fair Green'; the highest point of the mountain (1530') is marked 'Slievereagh' on the boundary of townlands Glenlary and Cloghast, all these places being in the parish of Ballingarry. He must have been even more delighted to discover that the large bivallate oval ringfort less than a mile to the north of Slievereagh (and a long spear-cast from 'Tobercanavore'), sometimes referred to by archaeologists as 'Glenbrohane Motte', was known locally as 'Lisdoonlagar', which he rendered (Lios) Dún gCláire, a name he recognized, no doubt, from such poems as iarfaideach aca taobh in the Book of Leinstier, which has the following lines: a Dún Chláirí cor Dún nGair (i.e. 'the fort by Lough Gur'), and: iscosct Dún Cláir is Dún Crot (i.e. 'the fort of the Galtees'). So it was marked on the OS map (Limerick 49 in Glenbrohane townland as 'Doonclara'.

One might have thought that O'Donovan would have been satisfied with his discovery, as he appeared to be in an early work, Sasana Cormaic ('Cormac's Glossary'), which etymologizes as follows: Cláir is Clu air is. mullach Cliaich, an obvious

---

11 By the sixteenth century the name had become Cnoc Leinge. (See Caithreim Dhomnachaidh, l. 356, in E. Rynne (ed.), North Munster Studies (Limerick, 1967) p. 518.
12 The reason I put 'Slievereagh' in quotes is that I believe O'Donovan was not totally accurate in confining this name to the mountain in Ballingarry parish. In an earlier article I drew attention to the fact that Sliabh Rithbhaich was synonymous with the earlier Sliabh Cain as O'Donovan himself noted in the supplement to E. O'Reilly, An Irish English Dictionary (Dublin, 1877) p. 701), now the 'Ballyhoura Mountains' between Co. Cork and Limerick, which probably did extend as far as the modern 'Slievereagh'. (See Éige, 29, p. 163).
13 Cláir is one of the sixty-two strongholds of the king of Cashel, as listed in the eleventh-century 'Book of Rights'. (M. Dillen (ed.), Liber regnorum Hiberniae (London, 1962) II, pp 622, 661).
14 In that era, sliabh denoted an area of high ground or moorland, often a whole mountain range, e.g. Sliabh gulcra (Gally Mountains). Names such as Cláir, Cua and Crotta Cliaich were used similarly. Ceann ('head') denoted a mountain top or peak.
15 OS Name Books, Limerick iii, 138 (Emlygerrnan par.). When O'Donovan wrote these names into the Ordnance Survey Name Books for insertion in 6" Ordnance map (Limerick 48), he corrected the parish to 'Glenbrohane or Ballingarry' (i.e. Ballingarry), and rendered the names as 'Tobercanavore' and 'Cannavore Stream'. (On the 1928 edition of the 6" OS map it is marked 'Tobar Cim Mhíli'). 'Cannavore Well' is still a familiar name in local tradition; it is now the source of a community water supply, and the stream flows freely from it. A photograph of the well was published by R. O'Donnell in the Killaloe Historical Society, Historical Journal, 2007, p. 76.
16 OS Name Books, Limerick I, 275.
17 Le, II, 3288, 3340.
attempt to combine Clu with Ara(id). Here O'Donovan noted: *Claire is the ancient name of the mountain of Sliabh Riach in the South of the County of Limerick. Mullach Cluach, the summit or highest land in the territory of Cliach, in which this mountain is situate*. But O'Donovan's next reference shows that he was wavering in his allegiance. In his edition of Leabhar na gCeart (1847), though he referred to *two forts called Dun g-Claire, one in Glenbrohane / Glenlara, and the other in the barony of Corkaguiny. Co. Kerry*, he described *Claire itself as 'a hill just east of Duntryleague'.

Duntryleague (*Dún Trí Liag, 'fort of three pillar-stones') is a townland in the parish of Galbally, to the east of Ballingarry, and also in Coshlea barony. The ruined passage tomb, the name of which, O'Donovan was informed locally in the course of his Ordnance Survey visitsations, was *Labuye Derimuoda* or *Leabaidh Dhiarmada agus Ghraise*, is not in the modern townland of Duntryleague but in that of Deerpark, which adjoins it to the east. The only other monument noted by him in the parish was the church of Duntryleague, shown on the OS map as having a circular fosse around it, which he referred to as *slight traces of the Doon [Brian Borumha's fort] in the churchyard*. The emergence of Duntryleague as a contender for the location of Claire came about, I believe, after O'Donovan had left the Ordnance Survey (in 1842), when between 1843 and 1847 he studied for the Bar in Gray's Infns, London, taking the occasional opportunity to visit Oxford, and in particular the Bodleian Library. Here he may have encountered (or re-encountered) *Agallamh na Seanrach*, the legendary account of St Patrick's meeting and conversation with the last stalwarts of the Fianna, Caolite and Oisin, in one or other of the two manuscript copies held there.

In this story, the interrogation of Caolite in respect of the Coshlea area was probably set somewhere in Clu. His first questioner wished to know where Aillill Ólum died, and was informed: *Marb e do cró-bhainne chumad a mullach Slébhi Claire thes ('He died on

---

19 W. Stokes (ed.), Cornac's glossary (Translated and annotated by the late John O'Donovan) (Calcutta, 1868). The translation now printed was made by O'Donovan many years before his death' (intro.). Note on *Claire on p. 35.
20 He was probably referring to *Dún Clair* in t. Farrancarriga, near Anascaul. See An Seabhac (P. Ó Siochfhradhá), *Triucha-chad Chorca Dhuibhne* (Baile Aths Cliath, 1938) leh.182.
21 J. O'Donovan (ed.), Leabhar na gCeart or the Book of Rights (Dublin, 1847) p. 92 (note x).
23 As 'Deerpark' does not seem to be recorded as a townland name before 1840, it was probably part of Duntryleague prior to that.
24 Named by Keating as one of the forts constituted by Brian, in *Foras fessa ar Éiríne ius*, p. 262, though it is not contained in an older list in J.H. Todd (ed.), *Cogadh Gaedhil le Gallchult*: wars of the Gaedhil with the Gauls (London, 1867) p. 146.
25 OSNB, Limerick iii, 195; OS Leit., Limerick i, 67 (222).
26 A letter of his dated 21 April 1846, reproduced in *An illustrated record of Ordnance Survey in Ireland* (Dublin, 1991) p. 26, contains the following: 'I shall have to cross the Irish Sea again on the first of May 1846. I intend to fly straight to London, and thence to Oxford ... where I intend to remain ...'
28 It is surprising that O'Donovan had not recalled the *Acclim* reference to Duntryleague during his Ordnance Survey years if, as O'Curry informs us in relation to a copy of the Book of Lismore he made for the RIA in 1839, it 'was carefully and attentively read over and collated with the original, by Dr. John O'Donovan and myself.' (E. O'Curry, *Lectures on the manuscript materials of ancient Irish history* (Dublin, 1861) p. 196). O'Donovan did, however, refer to the Book of Lismore and its tale of Cornac Cas's death and burial in *APM* (see note 32 below) ii, p. 867.
29 MSS Laud Misc. 610; Rawl. B. 487.
30 Aillill was a legendary king of Munster; the genealogists allotted him three sons, Eogan, Cornac Cas and Clan, from whom they derived the Eoghanacht, Dál gCais and Cianachta. (See *L.L.* ii. 37088-92).
the top of the Mount of Cláire in the south from great loss of blood"). Another query related to cath Samna, the battle of Knocksouna, near Kilmallock, where, so Caoilte informed his audience, Ailill’s son, Cormac Cas, had been seriously wounded, but lingered on as king of Munster for thirteen years. A stronghold and a fine residence were built for him at dún ar sléib (‘fortress on the mountain’). Around a clear spring well (used to bathe his head-wound) three stone pillars were erected. There he eventually died and was buried in a vault underneath the fortress. ‘For this reason it is called Dún Tri Liace’, said Caoilte.

There is no evidence here to connect Duntryleague with Cláire, but a poem added to the account confuses the story somewhat. It begins with pointing out ‘a pleasant fortress in the east, now called Dún Eochair’. This was probably at Brucc, and near there, apparently, one could see the graves of Ailill and his wife, Sadbh. The poem then relates the wounding of Cormac Cas at Samhain, but had him brought every day to bathe his head at Es Maighi (Caherass near Croom) before being conveyed to dún ar sléib, described as: co діn a athar budhên (‘to his own father’s house”). This does not tally with the prose, which describes Cormac’s chín ar sléib as a specially new-built residence, while Ailill’s was already on Sliabh Cláire.

During the late 1840s O’Donovan was engaged in his edition of the Annals of the Four Masters (AFM). Four references to Cláire occur in its volumes. In 1072 the death of Diarmaid mac Maoil na mBó, king of Leinster, in the battle of Odhba is celebrated in a poem which laments the slaying of comely youths in ceand Cláire, Cualant. A note informs us: ‘By this is meant King of Munster and Leinster. Cláire was the name of a hill near Duntryleague’, but continues: ‘and also of a royal fort in the same neighbourhood’, showing there was still some doubt in O’Donovan’s mind. Two vague references to cath Cláire in the first volume (A.M. 4169, 4694) in footnotes are referred onwards to a final note in the sixth volume, s.a. 1602. This reads: ‘Sliabh-Cláire, a considerable hill, on which stands a remarkable cromlech, the tomb of Oilioll Olum, King of Munster in the third century, situated a short distance to the east of the church of Duntryleague’.

No doubt it was the pressure of work involved in editing this massive work that resulted in putting Oilioll Olum in the tomb instead of Ailill’s son, Cormac Cas, a mistake repeated in his edition of the Topographical Poems, and by others later. Since the publication of O’Donovan’s edition of AFM with its prodigious assemblage of footnotes (most of them elucidating placenames), Irish scholars have gratefully resorted to it for solving problems regarding locations. His 1602 note is frequently used as evidence for equating Cláire with ‘a hill near Duntryleague’, e.g. by such editors as Hennessy.

33 Ibid., ii, 902.
34 Ibid., i, 58, 78.
35 Ibid., vi, 2150.
37 E.g. C.S. Boswell, ‘Place names from our older literature’, Irisceathar na Gaedhilge, 14 (1904) p. 626.
Meyer, K., Hogan, E., Ó Donnchadh, A., Dinneen, P.S., and O Daly, P.W. Joyce: ‘The Munster king ... encamped on the slope of the opposite hill, then called Slieve Claire, but now Slievereagh ... I visited this well a few years ago ... It is still well known in the district by the name of Tober Canvore, Canvore’s well, as I found by a very careful inquiry; so that Canvore has received his reward’.46

Cell Ráth
The location of Cell Ráth hi tóeb Chláire is obviously relevant to the location of Cláire. Efforts to locate the church site, however, have not been successful, since the name has been long obsolete. As mentioned earlier, Cóemán Cell Ráth indicates that more than one cell existed, but another early reference seems to show it in the singular, and with a definite article added.45 This is in a document dated 1200 AD, a confirmation by King John of a grant of lands to the Cistercian monastery of Blessed Mary de Magio, now Monasternenagh (Mainistir an Aonaigh), a parish (and ruined abbey) near Croom. This extensive grant covered much of east Limerick, including part of Emly diocese. The following is the section that concerns us here:

Rapalch, Cellpian, Lathrachlami, Bali Igerridir, with its appurtenances, to wit, from the river Gleannoneolain where it enters Isinbechtig to Imeleachdregindi, and so to Cillnaraith as the Samir runs from it, to wit, Tulachmin, and hence to the river Darachmucha.46

All these places are almost certainly in the barony of Coshlea, some being readily identifiable. The first named is now the townland of Rupullagh, in the parish of Darragh (south of Ballingarry), the ‘Darachmucha’ of the last name. ‘Imeleachdregindi’ is Emlyrennan parish, to the west of Ballingarry. Lathrachlami is Laraghlawe (graveyard), discussed below. ‘The river Gleannoneolain’ may be what is locally known as the Glen river, which runs under the bridge at Glenbrohane to join the Morningstar river. Bali Igerridir is not, as is sometimes thought, equivalent to Ballingarry; another (or possibly the same) ‘Bali igerridir’ occurs in a grant by Domhnall Ó Briain, king of Limerick (in AD 1182-86) to Holycross Abbey in Co. Tipperary, a daughter house of Monaster-enagh.47 The name denotes a place belonging to a grandson (or descendant) of Gerrodor, in Irish Bali Uí Gorruidir or Baile Ui Ghearruidhir;48 while in the ecclesiastical taxations of c. 1300 Ballingarry was named ‘Garthe’ and ‘Garthegriffin’49 (Gardhda Griffin), the eponym apparently being Griffin de Rupe. A Plea Roll dating from c.1297 records a suit

---

46 English translation in Calendar of documents relating to Ireland, 1171-1251 (London, 1875) p. 22 ($\S$136).
47 P.W. Joyce, Calendar of Ormond deeds 1173-1350 (6 vols, Dublin, 1932-43) i, p. 3.
49 Calendar of documents relating to Ireland, 1302-1307 (London, 1886) pp 289, 279.
by Alicia, widow of Griffin de Rupe, claiming lands in Garthegiffin, also in Laythyrathlau (from Peter le Botiller) and in other places.\textsuperscript{50} The prefixing of \textit{Baile} seems to have happened in the fifteenth century, the first appearance of ‘Ballegarri’ being in 1476.\textsuperscript{51} As neither \textit{baile} nor \textit{garrdh} was an element in pre-Norman church names, this was almost certainly a Norman replacement of an earlier Irish name.

My belief is that this site was one of the \textit{Cella Rāth} of the Tripartite Life, and the place described in the confirmation grant (above) as ‘Kilnarath as the Samair runs from it’.

The river name \textit{Samair} or \textit{Samhaoir} later became \textit{Camhaoir}, a word meaning ‘dawn’ and transformed into English as ‘Morningstar’, the river which rises in Ballingarry parish and flows through Bruff and Athlaca to join the Maigue.\textsuperscript{53} Four and a half centuries on, it appears in the Civil Survey as ‘a Brooke called Caum Ire which runneth thence betweene Ballingarry and Ballynlondery’.

With regard to the raths, a striking feature of the site of Ballingarry church and graveyard is the large platform ringfort nearby, listed by T.B. Barry as a possible example of an original rath transformed in the thirteenth or fourteenth century into an imitation of an Anglo-Norman motte.\textsuperscript{55} An excavation in 1949-50 of Ballingarry Down (as it is now known), led by John Hunt, produced evidence of a number of superimposed buildings on an original simple ringfort, ‘pointing to an intensive habitation from Early Christian times’.\textsuperscript{56} It is quite likely that here was one of the raths of \textit{Cella Rāth}.

Another large ringfort is marked in the north-west corner of Ballingarry townland, and just across the nearby boundary road, in Ballyfroota townland, is a former ecclesiastical site marked by an old graveyard (with circular fence) and holy well, ‘Toberecondoney’ (\textit{Tober Ri an Domhnaigh}). But the largest rath in the vicinity is that marked ‘Doonglara’ in the townland of Glenbrohane, a name which is sometimes assumed to be connected with the Broccan of the Tripartite Life.\textsuperscript{57} While it is unlikely that \textit{Broccan} (a personal name meaning ‘little badger’) would change to ‘Brucháin’, as in ‘Gleann Bruacháin’, a possible connexion cannot be ruled out. As a townland name Glenbrohane does not appear in the seventeenth-century Down Survey or Civil Survey. In Lewis it is referred to as ‘a village ... containing 44 houses and 233 inhabitants. Here is the R.C. chapel ... built in 1819’.

Furthermore, half a mile north of ‘Doonglara’ and just over a mile from Ballingarry is the church site marked on the OS map as (a) Templenalawe, and (b) Laraghawe Grave Yard, in the townland of Glenlary (\textit{Gleann Láithraigh}).\textsuperscript{59} The two churches were in the


\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Calendar of Papal letters} 13, p. 477.

\textsuperscript{52} In A. Ó Maolchabhail (ed.), \textit{Logainmneacha na hÉireann, Imi. i. Contae Luainnigh} (Baile Átha Cliath, 1990) leh. 106, it is equated with tl. Kilnorath in par. Killogra (near Croom), but that parish is in a different barony (and diocese).

\textsuperscript{53} See Joyce, \textit{Irish names of places}, ii, pp 486-7.


\textsuperscript{58} S. Lewis, \textit{A topographical dictionary of Ireland} (2 vols, London, 1837) i, p. 659.

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Gleann Láithraigh in Logainmneacha na hÉireann, i.}, p. 188. The adjoining townland, Knocklary, is given as \textit{Cnoc Láithraigh}, ibid., p. 129.
same parish, and actually shared its name in the seventeenth century: ‘Ballingary & Lahrhagly’. In the Taxation list of c. 1300 the site was termed ‘Chapel of Lathergh’, also ‘Latherlaw’. By 1476 it seems to have become derelict, but remained in the custody of the Mac Bryen family until the Reformation. In the earliest list of AD 1200, already referred to, it was ‘Lathracelami’, indicating Láthraclámhe, (‘site’, or possibly ‘imprint’, of a hand). It is worth while quoting verbatim O’Donovan’s field notes in the Name Book: ‘Lougherlawe’ — popular — láithreach láimh (‘mň’ very nasal) a battle field where many hands were cut off. Laraglawe. J. O. D. Tampulnâl (Exmnr). Is not the one the name of the church yard and the other that of the old church standing in it? J. O’D. Yes.

There are conflicting accounts as to the origin of the name. The form obtained by O’Donovan involves a genitive plural (láimh), changed from the original singular (láimhe), perhaps to accommodate the story of the battlefield. But a seventeenth-century genealogical compilation derives the name from a man named Lámha who came with his two sons into Clu: Hinc Láthrach Lámh amuil adrar, agus as ann adadh (‘from this is Láthrach Lámh as is said, and it was there he died’). And from his brother, Lámh, the Láamhaigh are said to derive. This accords with the story in the Tripartite Life during Patrick’s sojourn in east Limerick (just prior to the incident involving Caomhán Ceall Ráth) which tells of four men who received a pardon for the theft of Patrick’s horses. One of the four, Aodh, was his groom, and Patrick blessed his hands and told him his name henceforth would be Lámáed (‘Hand-Aodh’) — is uad atáat Lámraíge (‘and from him are the Lámhaigh’). The most recent (and most unlikely) explanation, the ‘tale as it was told to me’, is that published in 1920 by P.J. Lynch. While it does make a connexion with Patrick, and perhaps has echoes of the horse-stealing episode, it portrays the saint in an unflattering, even unchristian light, and has the hallmarks of a written communication from an amateur antiquarian, with its ‘explanation’ of Laraglawe as ‘leath re laimh which means “beside the hand”’. O’Donovan, who got his information from native speakers of Irish, including ‘William Lyons, an Irish historian’, recorded no such tradition.

Apart from the Patrician context and its renown as a royal stronghold, Cláire figures prominently in early Irish literature. Mention has already been made of a poem from the twelfth-century Book of Leinster, relating how Ailill acquired the sobriquet Ollum (‘Bare-

---

60 Simington, Civil Survey, Limerick, p. 230. See also ‘Ballingarvey & Lavagha’ in S. Pender (ed.), A census of Ireland, circa 1659 (Dublin, 1939) p. 271. While today the civil parish is still Ballingarry, in the Catholic divisions it is Gleadhreabh parish.
61 Cdl. of Documents, Ireland, v, pp 279, 289.
62 See Cat. of Papal letters 13, p. 478: ‘Mandate ... to collate and assign to Dermot Macbreyn, scholar, of the diocese of Emily ... the church called the rural [church] of Laraglen ... so long void that there is no certain knowledge of the mode of its voidance’.
63 See The Irish plants of the Tudor sovereigns (reprint, 4 vols, Dublin, 1994) ii, p. 9 (no. 84): ‘Protection for Matthew, son of Cornelius MacBryen, and Maurice, son of Matthew MacBryen, clerks ... in the chapel of Latherbel’ (et al.).
64 OS Letts., Limerick i, 270. (The ‘Examiner’ was not J. O’D., and ‘Yes’ seems to have been added at a later stage).
65 In modern Munster Irish, láimhe is pronounced lá, which accounts for the ending ‘-law(s)’ in anglicized forms. See B. O’ Cuív, The Irish of West Munster. Co. Cork (Dublin, 1944) §§ 71, 185.
67 Bethu Phátraic, ii, 2340-44.
69 Briefly, the story involves a poor widow whose billhook was stolen by one of Patrick’s men who, on owning up to the theft and handing up the billhook, had his hand cut off on Patrick’s orders as a reward.
ear”), and how, when he slew Áine, the vengeful horsemen from the elf-mound burned his strongholds at Dún Cláire is Dún Crot.70 Another story speaks as follows of Ailill’s fort: I n-óchtór Chláiri ro bóí Ailill rí ráith Atella hi Cláirtu; at eithir dí Chein ní fagabá(i)r í n-ócús (‘Ailill dwelt on the top of Cláire and Ailill’s ráth on Cláire is seen from afar and from near by it is not discovered’).71 Others besides Ailill felt honoured at having their names anchored to Cláire, and thereby to the kingship of Munster: his son Cormac (Cas), Corc, Mogh Corb and his grandson, Aonghus Tíreach.72 When two sons of the King of Munster (Dubh, son of Aonghus Tíreach), were slain in battle, Finn of the Fianna lamented the evil tidings that needed to be brought to their homeplace, co cathair t-Shleibe Claire bodes co for-imell t-Shleibe Cua (‘to the Fortress of the Mount of Cláire in the south and to the outskirts of Slieve Gua’). When Finn and his men visited St Moling, choice dishes from various regions were offered them, including fóil daim Chnuisce Cláire (‘venison from the hill of Cláire’).74 References to battles there are frequent; one source speaks of four: cethri catha i Cláirti,75 Cormac mac Cuileannain, king of Munster (c. 900 AD) is said to have fought a battle at Cenn Cláiri.76 It is mentioned in the annals, e.g. in 1113 when Connacht invaders reached as far as Sliabh Crot, Cláire and Sliabh Cua. As late as 1600, part of the route taken by Hugh O’Neill’s army marching to Kinsale was: do sileibh muice, doirttheir shléibe Cláire, don bhearnoigh dheircce (‘by Slivenamuck, by the east side of the mountain of Cláire, by the Gap of Redchair’).77

Geoffrey Keating was familiar with the name of Cláire when he wrote his History of Ireland in the seventeenth century, and quoted from a poem which described the three sons of Cormac mac Airt as lucht airgne Chláire na gcreach (‘plunderers of Cláire of the spoils’).79 He also borrowed from an English historian, John Stow, a legend portraying the stones of Stonehenge as having been moved there from Cláire: na clocha rug Merlin go Breathnaibh ó Shliabh gCláire.80 Stow’s own account is as follows:

The Chronicles of the Brytaine doe testifie that whereas the Saxons, about the yeere of our Lord 450, had slaine 480 of the Brytaine nobility by treason ... Aurelius Ambrose now king of the Brytaines ... caused these stones to bee sette up in a place of their murther and buryall, the which stones hadde beene first brought from Affrike into Ireland, and placed on Mount Kyllare and from thence by the industrious meanes of Merlin, were conveyed to this place ... Ambroseus was buryed at Stone Henge then called Chorea Gigantum.81
The name Claire is obviously a derivative of clár which denotes a level expanse, and is used here to denote a raised level area or plateau. Another derivative, cláiracht, is more often found in this sense, e.g. Clareagh Mountain near Millstreet, Co. Cork, of similar shape to Slievereagh, whose ‘platform’ is lovingly described by Westropp in appropriate terms: ‘Even from the belfry of Limerick Cathedral ... the platform of Slievereagh, blue with distance, is, next to the great Galteemore, the chief feature of the hills ‘fringing the southern sky’.

The protagonists

This brings us to the disputed location of Claire, the two chief disputants being Thomas Johnson Westropp (1860-1922) and Patrick Joseph Lynch (1850-1931). Both were natives of Co. Limerick born in the mid-nineteenth century, and were employed by the Board of Works as surveyors, Lynch having studied architecture while Westropp obtained a degree in engineering at Trinity College Dublin. While Lynch progressed in his career, and was assistant surveyor for the south of Ireland before he retired in 1910, Westropp, whose father was a landowner in Attyflin House near Patrickswell, had independent means, and left the Board of Works in 1888 in order to devote all his time to antiquarian work. Both men were keenly involved in antiquarian research and in studying archaeological remains, and used their professional skills to good effect in making measurements, sketches, etc. Westropp published his first academic paper in 1888, a note on Quin Abbey in Co. Clare, a county which was to be the mainspring of his field researches. It was the first of over 300 antiquarian articles, mainly in Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy (of which he became editor in 1889) and in the Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries, of whose Society he became president in 1916.

Lynch joined that Society also in 1883 and became a Fellow six years later, but his interests lay almost exclusively in the Thomond area. During his entire career as surveyor, he made Limerick his headquarters, and in 1892 was one of the founders of the Limerick Field Club, later re-established as the North Munster Archaeological Society (1909-19).

Westropp’s first article concerning Claire, with its valuable references from the Plea Rolls (see n. 50 above), was published in 1904-5. Here he referred to ‘the Fort of Dunglare, the Clare of the Book of Rights, ante 900’, but remained vague as to the location of ‘Cllrath’: ‘in Clach ... perhaps at Carranebane or Cappanahonna [both places in bar. Owneybeg (Uaithne)], but further on mentions ‘Caeman of Cellratha, near Duntrileague’. In 1916-17 he concentrates on ‘Doonlaura’ or ‘Glenbrogan Mote’, quoting Old Irish sources on Claire. In the following issue of the Proceedings, he takes issue with ‘the contradiction to the assertion in my former paper that Sliab Claire is Sliab Riach ... The objects only quote one of O’Donovan’s notes, forgetting that he regarded Slievereagh as Sliab Claire until his desire to date the undatable dolmens made

82 Cf. Ceir Ùi Cheasainn d’ Cláiracht, in J. O’Donovan (ed.), The tribes of Ireland, by Aenghus O’Daly (Dublin, 1852) p. 66.
him identify as Oilioll Aulom’s tomb on ‘Sliab Cláire’ the Bronze Age dolmen on Duntryleague Hill.” He makes a valid point here, but not when he attempts to equate ‘Cnocklaura’ with ‘Cnoc gCláire’ and ‘Glenbrochain’ with ‘Rath Broccain’. In another (1918) article he again makes a critical comment: ‘O’Donovan’s OS Letters were unusually hasty and incomplete for this district. He does not describe the remains at Cush, the great Dun Claire ... but at least he identified Slievereagh as Sliab (or Cenn) Claire.’

P.J. Lynch’s first main series of articles, ‘Cromleacs in County Limerick’, was spread over eight Journal issues between 1902 and 1911. When treating of Duntryleague, he declared unequivocally: ‘This hill was known in ancient times as Sliabh Claire’, and repeated this in a longer article in 1911. In 1920 he published his first full-length article on the subject. In his introduction he expressed regret at differing from the opinions of recent writers: ‘We are all searching after truth, and truth should prevail’. He thought an old church site in Lackelly West (par. Gallally) may have been the ‘Kilrath’ of the Tripartite Life. He maintained that ‘Slievereagh is the Cenn Abrat of Sliab Caoin’, but not ‘Sliab Claire, as some writers believe’. He accepted Westropp’s location of Temair Erann / Luachra on ‘the slopes of Cenn Abrat’ (‘It is now admitted that Luachair was more extensive, and included Cenn Abrat’) but could find no ‘cromlech’ there. He then states his position clearly: ‘the fort of Doonaglara was not a stronghold of Oilioll Olum’s ... The fort of Oilioll Olum ... must have been on the north side, and Duntryleague (Claire) naturally suggests itself’. He corrects Westropp’s derivation of Knocklara from Cnoc gClaire, though his own is hardly an improvement (‘Cnoc Leath-rath’). Having quoted (in n. 44) O’Donovan’s ‘mistake’ in equating Cláire with Sliabh Riach, and approving his later ‘correction’ to Duntryleague, he gives his own probable location for Cláire: ‘Cláir, a plain ... it is evident that Claira or Clair represented a district in the Co. Limerick, though it has not been defined, possibly the plain north of the Samair.’ Later, he equated Dún Cláire with Dún ar Sléibh, but not with Dún Trí Liag, which he put further down the hill, ‘an extension or annex to the original Dún ... All the references would lead to the conclusion that the earlier fort was the Dun Claire of Oilioll Olum’s time’. Some years later, a third local participant entered the debate. M.J. Fitzgerald, of Dromanny House south of Limerick, published an article in a Cork journal, dealing


88 T.J. Westropp, ‘Temair Erann, an ancient cemetery of the Ernai on Slievereagh, Co. Limerick’, *JRSAI.* 48 (1918) pp 111-120:112. (Westropp (and others) spent much time and effort in trying to locate the legendary Temair Erann (als Temair Luachra). His work succeeded in persuading the Ordnance Survey officials, who had ‘Temair Erann’ shown on the 1928 edition of the OS 6 inch map (Limerick 48), underneath ‘Slievereagh’ (which was in larger characters). T.F. O’Rahilly, in an introductory note to J.C. Watson (ed.), *Mosca Ulad* (Dublin, 1967) pp xxxvi-xxxix, argued that Temair Luachra / Erann was a legendary site which originally denoted simply ‘the Tara of pre-Goidelic times’.

89 *Journal of the Limerick Field Club,* nos. 1-12; *Journal of the North Munster Arch. Soc.,* vol. 1 (nos. 1-4).

90 Inl Limerick Field Club, iii, no. 12 (June, 1968) p. 217.


93 He sought out P.W. Joyce (see n. 44) prior to his death in 1914, and pressed his views on him: ‘Dr Joyce admitted to the writer that he was in error in identifying Slievereagh as Sliab Claire’ (*JRSAI.* 50, p. 123, n. 57).

94 This contradicts what he had stated in his 1908 article (p. 220): ‘The remains of Dun g-Claire, another of the royal forts of Munster, stand above the glen [Glenbrohan], on the northern slope of Sliabh Riach’.

95 *JRSAI.* 50 (1920) p. 118.

96 Ibid., p. 123.

97 M.J. Fitzgerald, ‘Notes on the land-grant of John, lord of Ireland, to the Cistercians of Mainster an Enaigh (De Magto), Co. Limerick’, *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society,* 58 (1953) pp 22-5. (The article concludes with ‘(To be continued)’, but I could not trace any sequence).
with some of the lands granted to Monasternenagh (the section referred to above). Much of his material was borrowed from Westropp and, in the case of Laraghlawe, from Lynch, whose ‘tradition’ of the robber’s severed hand appears to have taken root (though featuring a hatchet rather than a billhook). He equates Baligerrid with Ballingarry, but makes a renewed effort to locate Kilnarath. Pointing out that the source of the ‘Samair’ is a well in the bog of Griston, he proposes the adjoining townland of Kilgariff, which, he informs us, contained nine raths. It did not, however, have a church site, and moreover (something of which he was aware), the ‘Kil’ element did not derive from cóill but from coill, ‘a wood’, Coill Gharrabh, as O’Donovan got it from his Irish historian. Interesatly, nine of the Fianna who took part in the legendary battle of Ventry bore the name Garbh, three of those being Garbh Shléibhi Cua, Garbh Shléibhi Cláir, Garbh Shléibhi Crot, the middle one almost certainly denoting Garbh of Sliabh Cláire, so it is possible that Kilgariff denotes ‘Garbh’s wood’ rather than ‘rough wood’.

As mentioned at the outset, the main share of the blame for the disputed location of Cláire has to be laid at the feet of John O’Donovan, who may, as Westropp noted, have travelled too hastily through Coshlea. Yet anyone who can visualise O’Donovan’s countrywide travels and his prodigious labours in pre-famine Ireland will readily forgive a hasty identification or an ambiguity in site location. The two main protagonists who conducted such a gentlemanly dispute have also earned our respect for their diligent researches which proved of much benefit to their successors. Of the two, I would agree with Westropp’s conclusions, but who knows what the next participant may think of mine. And in case these may have become difficult to abstract from a mass of contradictory statements, I had better set them out again in brief here.

Conclusions
(1) The ‘Slieveveagh’ marked on the OS map is only a part of the original Sliabh Riabhach mountain range between Cos Cork and Limerick, earlier called Sliabh Caoin, and later the Ballyhoura Hills / Mountains. (See Éigse 29 (1996) 153-171).
(2) Cláire, or Sliabh Cláire, denotes the mountain north-east of Kilfinane, mainly in the parish of Ballingarry-Glenbrohane; Ceann Cláire was the peak marked ‘Slieveveagh’ (1841), ‘The Pinnacle / Labbanabiertha’ (1928) on the OS maps.
(3) ‘Doonglara’ (‘Glenbrohane Mote’) is probably Dún (g)Cláire, the royal fortress of the Book of Rights, and the legendary residence of Aillil Ólum.
(4) Cóemán Cell Ráth denotes ‘Caomhán of the churches of the raths’. It seems likely that one of these churches was sited in the old graveyard at Ballingarry, another at Laraghlawe (Láthrach Láimhe) / Templeinalawe, in the nearby townland of Glenlary.

Acknowledgments
I am indebted to my colleagues in the Locus project, Prof. Pádraig Ó Riain and Dr Kevin Murray, for their constant assistance and encouragement. My sincere gratitude also to the three Glenbrohane men who so kindly guided me around the historic sites and shared their local knowledge with me: Morgan Murphy, who farms near Ballingarry Down; Michael Tobin whose land adjoins Dún gCláire; and Michael O’Reilly, on whose property stands Ballynahinch Castle.

98 OSNB Limerick i. p. 272.