

Social and Spatial Order in the MacMahon Lordship of Airghialla in the Late Sixteenth Century

PATRICK J. DUFFY

The main source for understanding the territorial structure of Gaelic Ireland in the later medieval period is the legacy of English versions of it which were constructed in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. These records are the consequence of a meeting of two societies with different, though not mutually unfamiliar,¹ perceptions of priorities in owning and working the land. The emerging modern state placed emphasis on measurement of acres, spaces and boundaries, expressed in surveys, inventories and maps of property and land values. The Gaelic world had a different sense of landscape and its economic and social significance. There was, however, a shape and spatial order to the Gaelic landscape, which in spite of cultural and tenurial differences was real and discoverable to the colonial authorities.

That the 'past is a foreign country' with different social practices may be due more to the way we see Gaelic Ireland through the language of our time or the language of Tudor administrators than anything else: we can be ensnared by words making it possible to misread past landscapes. Smyth has spoken of the dangers of 'projecting modern evaluations of land-use uncritically backwards in time'.² Concepts of 'ownership', 'tenant', 'freeholder', 'estate' are all fundamental features of the spatial organisation of landscape for us today, where boundaries around pieces of property have clear social and legal significance. Thus terminology can lead us unconsciously to make unwarranted assumptions about landscape realities in the pre-modern state.

It is important, however, to appreciate that different cultural experiences and modes of production have a variety of spatial expressions or spatialities, and to apply this awareness to our understanding of Gaelic organisation of space. Dodgshon has argued for the need to see landscapes and spatial order 'as

¹ See B. Cunningham and R. Gillespie, 'Englishmen in sixteenth-century Irish annals' in *Ir. Econ. & Soc. Hist.*, 17 (1990), 5-21. ² A.P. Smyth, *Celtic Leinster: towards an historical geography of early Irish civilisation AD 500-1600* (Dublin, 1982), 86.

developing within an ideological context that provided ideas on how society should be organised within itself and how it should relate to its resource base'. So for instance, feudal relations were mapped into the landscape, which was 'part of the way the king both controlled and exploited his realm'.³ Spatiality can thus be conceptualised as being socially produced and layered with meanings which vary across time and cultures. The problem is to understand the nature of the production of space and landscape in Gaelic Ireland.

This said, however, initial attempts to reconstruct the configuration of Gaelic landscapes are less prone to misinterpretation when using empirically-grounded descriptive data than when using more conceptually ambiguous narrative accounts such as Gaelic annals or poetry.⁴ Although concentrating on empirical space, or space as simply territorial containers of things, is only part of reality, landscapes as topographical facts are less prone to ambiguity or misreading than landscapes as imaginary constructs. Acknowledging the existence, therefore, of some obstacles to understanding, and the incompleteness of this approach to the past, the following essay will examine the evidence of a number of topographical sources to see how space was organised in the south Ulster territory of Airghialla in the late sixteenth century.

THE LANDSCAPES OF MACMAHON'S LORDSHIP

By the sixteenth century the Gaelic lordship of Airghialla was largely under the control of the MacMahons. Apart from the northern district of Truagh which was held by MacKennas (subservient to MacMahon in the sixteenth century), all the other sub-territories in the lordship were dominated by branches of the MacMahons. When MacMahon's country was shired as Monaghan in 1584, these territories were established as the baronies of Trough, Monaghan, Dartrey, Cremourne and Farney. As part of a policy to settle internal disputes in the county and to introduce the lineaments of English local administration, the government in Dublin undertook a survey and division of the lands in the county in 1591. This inquisition recorded the names of all landholders in the county and the territorial disposition of their lands. A similar survey was undertaken in 1606 after the nine years war to re-establish the earlier settlement.⁵

3 R.A. Dodgshon, 'The changing evaluation of space 1500-1914' in R.A. Dodgshon and R.A. Butlin (eds.), *An historical geography of England and Wales* (2nd edition, London, 1990), 255-78: 255, 256. 4 B. Cunningham, 'Native culture and political change in Ireland 1580-1640' in C. Brady and R. Gillespie (eds.), *Natives and newcomers: essays on the making of Irish colonial society 1534-1641* (Dublin, 1986), 148-70. 5 The 1591 survey of Co. Monaghan is printed in *Inquisitions of Ulster*, vol II, xxi-xxxi. The 1606 division of Monaghan: *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1606-8 (London, 1875), 161-86.

What kind of physical landscape was represented in this south Ulster county? With counties Down, Armagh and Cavan, Monaghan contains the most characteristic drumlin landscapes in Ireland. These are distinctive countryside of oval-shaped hills, interspersed with small lakes strung out along streams and rivulets which wind among the hills. The north-western boundary of Monaghan runs through the only true mountainous upland in the county – Sliabh Beagh – which reaches up to 400 metres (Fig. 1). Another upland ridge extends east–west across the centre of the county from mid-Armagh. A third fairly extensive upland of 200–300 metres in the southern half of the county continues into east Cavan. These uplands separate three east–west trending lowland districts – in the north a limestone-based corridor extending from north Armagh south-westwards to Clones and the Erne lake-lands in Fermanagh; in mid-county, extending into east Cavan, and an extension of the plain of Louth into Farney barony in the south of the county.

With the exception of Slieve Beagh, all of the area is covered in drumlins, so extensive as to have given the Gaelic word to the scientific study of these glacially-deposited hills: the many townland names with the prefix *drum* reflect the significance of these hills. The almost ubiquitous cover of drumlins smooths over the differences in structural elevation and gives the landscape an appearance of uniformity. The drumlin topography, however, varies through the county reflecting the underlying structural geology. Thus, for example, in the northern and southernmost lowland districts, the drumlins are small, symmetrical in shape and are composed entirely of glacial drift. In contrast, the upland areas contain more widely spaced ‘drumlinoid’ hills, which often comprise a rock core on which the glacial drift has been deposited.

Sixteenth-century Airghialla did not exhibit the environmental extremes of Donegal or Tyrone, with their mountain fastnesses and rich river basins. In the south Ulster and Monaghan areas, there is a narrow but locally significant range in ecological potential which is important in trying to understand some of the rationale behind the Gaelic organisation of landscape resources. Of some value in understanding the territorial order in the landscape is the variety of Gaelic names for the innumerable hills: apart from ‘*drum*’, there is a range of names which represent subtle environmental varieties in the region’s topography – *cor*, *tulach*, *cnoc*, *cabhán*, *lurga*, *ard*, *éadán*, *mullach*, *tón*, *gréach*. Many other names too are measures of ecological variety and land potential, such as *cluain*, *eanach*, *srath*, and *achadh*. Each of them presumably have different chronological horizons and their precise meanings may continue to elude us today.

Soil quality is a consequence of the nature of the glacial drift, the underlying rock, slope gradients and drainage, as well as agricultural changes in the past four centuries. The best and most well drained soils are to be found in the limestone lowlands in the north and extreme south. Impeded drainage which

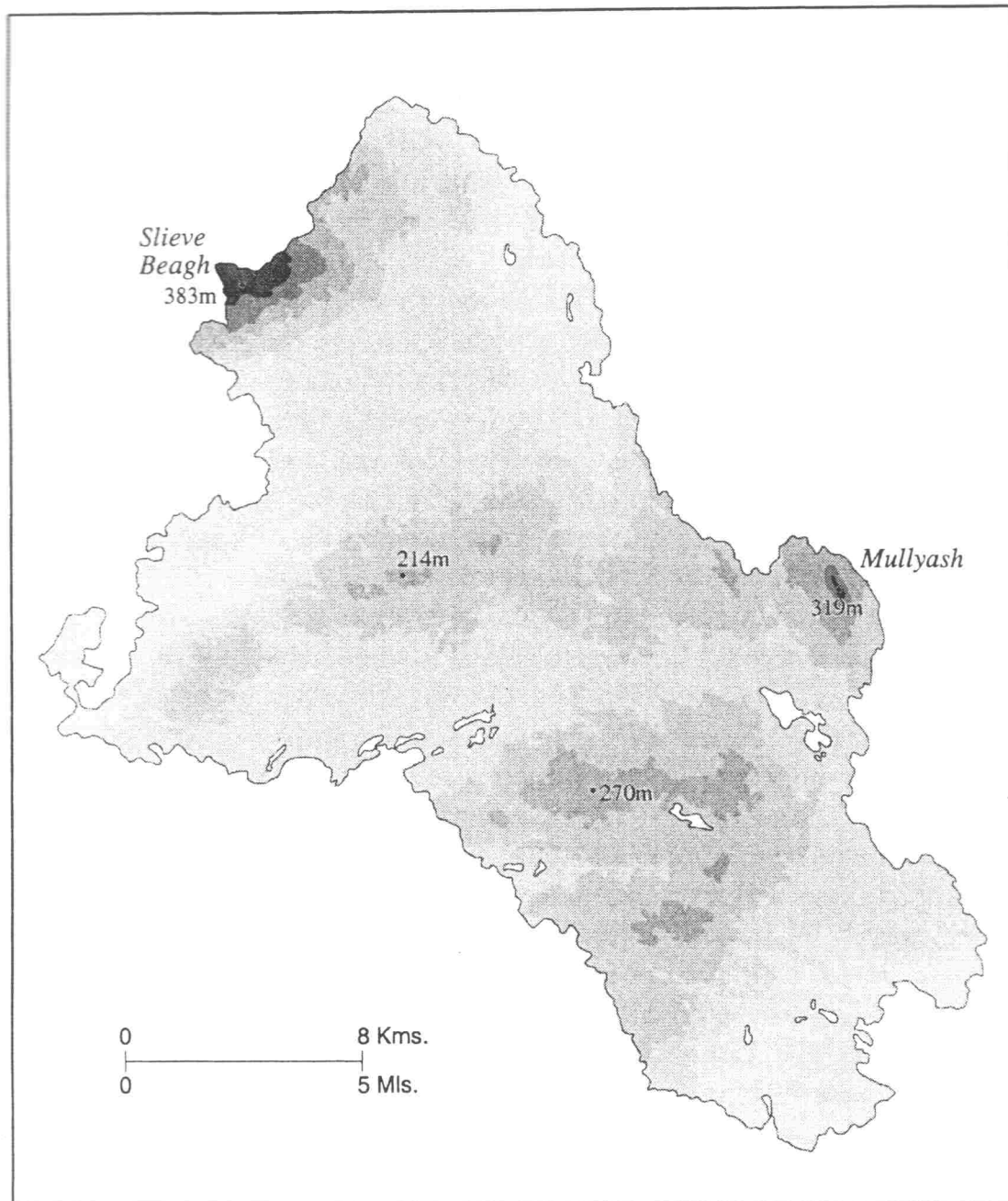


FIG. 1: Relief map of Co. Monaghan.

is characteristic of drumlin landscapes, is more pronounced in the lowlands and has caused the formation of alluvial flats, marshes and lakes. These kinds of landscape were much more extensive in the pre-plantation centuries: drainage is one of the principal consequences of agricultural husbandry in the intervening period. As evidenced in surveys of Farney in 1612 and 1634, it was unlikely that there were extensive forests or woodlands in sixteenth-century Monaghan. In William Smith's survey of 1612, 'the woods are all underwoods

and there is no timber trees in all the barony⁶; Raven's maps of 1634 list small clumps of 'shrubby woods'⁷, all of which give the lie to folkloric images of various lord deputies hacking their way through dense woodlands in south Monaghan.

Smith's survey gives a general profile of the sort of landscape resources which characterised Gaelic south Ulster:

There is in Clancarvill [a district in the northwest of Farney] 30 tates of the mountain land containing 1950 acres. And in Farney there is 96 tates containing 6240 acres the which mountain land in both the places maketh 8190. There is of the better sort of land in Clancarvill 57 tates . . . [3795 acres] and . . . in Farney there is 53 tates [9945 acres] . . . there is 1458 acres of wood and 336 acres of Bog well dispersed in the country and all good turbaries. There is 14 great Loghs . . . [and] many other small loghs . . .⁸

Twenty years later Raven's survey provides a typical inventory of this same south Monaghan landscape in tabulated references to townland maps, as the following examples show:

Monanny

A. Parcel of arable adjacent the bog	78 acres
B. Small hills of shrubby wood	10
C. Parcel of meadow with a hill called Knocknowtha	9
D. Parcel of bog lying adjacent Coolderry	38
E. An island within it with some shrubby wood	18

Killabrick

A. Arable and good pasture	62
B. Shrubby wood	42
C. Bog	27
D. Meadow	7
E. Small meadow	4

Longfield Etra

A. Arable	40
B. Shrubby wood	40

6 'A booke of survey of ffarney and Clancarvile in the kingdom of Ireland . . . Wm Smith. 1612', Longleat Library, Irish Papers, Box 1, Bundle 1, hereafter 'Smith's Survey of Farney'.

7 Thomas Ravens's survey of Farney 1634, Longleat Irish papers. 8 'Smith's survey of Farney 1612'.

C. Shrubs, wood, pasture	18
D. Arable by river with meadow	45
E. Meadow by the river	6

Longfield Otra

A. Arable	62
B. shrubs wood pasture within the arable	8
C. parcel of arable	7
D. Shrub wood pasture by the river and bog	34
E Lower pasture bog	8
Lower pasture by the brook	4

GAELIC TERRITORIALISATION

The rich legacy of place-names, and the complex and bloody interlordship struggles over lands and territory in the sixteenth century, are confirmation of the social importance of controlling space and the primacy of land in Gaelic Ireland: territorial divisions and the intricate naming of the landscape are manifestations of this. The Tudor surveyors set out to recover this intricate geography from the oral tradition and local memory. Maps and surveys by inquisition were the tools of the colonisers who came from Britain in increasing numbers in the sixteenth century. Gaelic Ireland had a highly spatialised landscape system with a territorial hierarchy from smallest landholding divisions (in Airghialla called tates), through intermediate septlands called ballybetaghs, through ecclesiastical parishes, to baronies.⁹ The eclipse of Gaelic political and social order in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century resulted in the loss of much of this structural diversity.

The modern townland is a legacy of the pre-plantation, late medieval and possibly the early medieval period (Fig. 2). The continuity in these townland spaces and boundaries has been disputed, however. Geographers, in particular, have based their studies of the landscape and its evolution on the comparative endurance of such a fundamental topographical process as territorialisation, or the process of territorial organisation of landscape resources. To what extent are we justified in using the complex network of modern townlands and other units to reconstruct landscapes of half a millennium and more ago? Some historians consider that geographers have been too ready to assume continuity in townlands, parishes and baronies over the centuries, ignoring the 'environ-

⁹ See T. McErlean, 'The Irish townland system of landscape organisation' in T. Reeves-Smyth and F. Hammond (eds.), *Landscape archaeology of Ireland* (Oxford, 1983), 315-39; K. Nicholls, 'Gaelic society and economy in the high middle ages' in A. Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, ii: *medieval Ireland, 1169-1534* (Oxford, 1987), 397-438: 408.

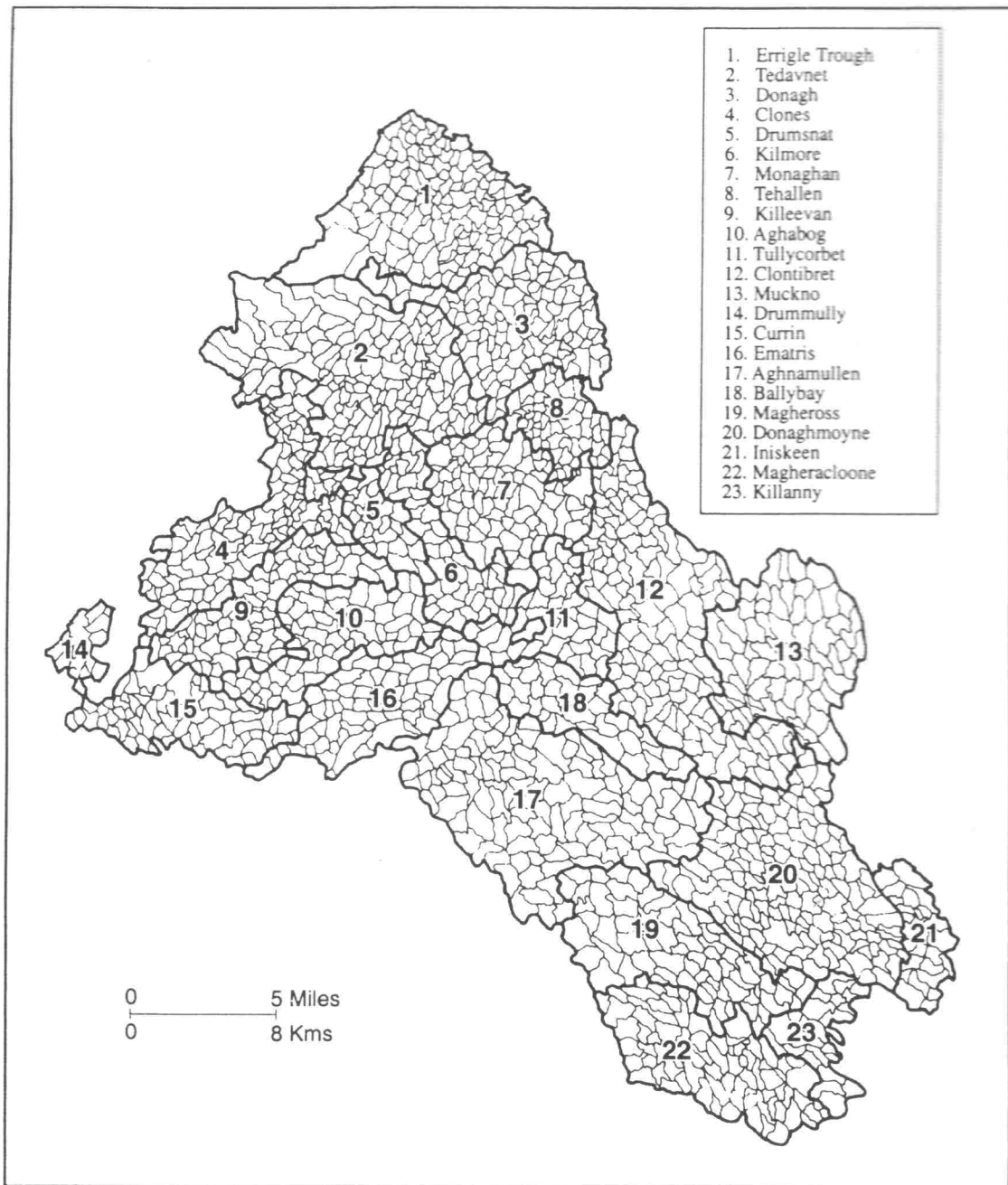


FIG. 2: Townlands in parishes.

mental changes' which resulted from new settlers occupying the countryside.¹⁰ However, it seems to be a universal fact about landscape morphology that once boundaries with important societal significance (such as political or landholding or other property associations) are established they endure, and subsequent changes in the landscape and its inhabitants tend to take place within this

¹⁰ See, for example, N. Canny reviewing W.J. Smyth and K. Whelan (eds.), *Common ground: essays on the historical geography of Ireland* in *Ir. Econ. & Soc. Hist.*, 16 (1989), 117.

established framework.¹¹ Indeed a comparatively stable territorial template is necessary to facilitate the transfer of land and the transformation of the environment which comes with economic development. The Gaelic units like the tates in Monaghan became the ultimate landholding device in the new world of leases. While some local adjustments were made to larger territorial units by plantation administrators in the early seventeenth century,¹² in all cases these consisted of aggregates of the small local units which today are called townlands. In general, as discussed below, the social, fiscal or ecclesiastical significance of territories like baronies and parishes was such that their traditional or customary limits were well-known locally and continued through the generations before the English cartographers and surveyors set them down on maps.

Traditionally Gaelic Ireland has been perceived as containing a highly mobile and fluctuating population, a perception corroborated by reports of sixteenth-century colonial authorities, by the contemporary tendency of lords to move large cattle herds about the country, the appearance of wandering creaghts in the sixteenth century and the tendency for tenants and labourers to abandon oppressive and wartorn lordships. Contemporary maps also tend to provide pictorial representations of fairly transient-looking houses (see Andrews and Horning, this volume). These characteristics have been perceived as being incompatible with an assertion of fixed territories and well-bounded spaces. Therefore when we come to look at the spatial organisation of a sixteenth-century Gaelic lordship, it is important to establish the bona fides of the modern townland network as a source of understanding.

Monaghan county is a particularly useful case study. It has a detailed record of territorial denominations in the early modern period. The 1591 and 1606 divisions of the county contain the names of up to a thousand tates. There is also an extensive record of territorial structure for the first forty years of the seventeenth century in the Essex estate which included most of the barony of Farney. This information can be translated to the modern townland map to help study the morphology of the townlands to see what evidence it provides on the logic of Gaelic spatiality.

Raven's 1634 mapping survey of Farney is a comprehensive atlas of the smallest territorial divisions and provides a benchmark to demonstrate the continuity between the modern townland net and the pre-plantation regime of tates for a substantial segment of the county. Raven's survey was undertaken following a period during which there had been little success in planting the Essex estate. Apart from a small settlement in Carrickmacross, there was little evidence of settlers in the countryside.¹³ The territory had continued

¹¹ See note 40 below. ¹² See R. Gillespie, *Colonial Ulster: the settlement of east Ulster 1600-1641* (Cork, 1985), 18-19. ¹³ P. J. Duffy, 'Farney in 1634: an examination of Thomas Raven's survey of the Essex estate' in *Clogher Record*, 11/2 (1983), 245-56.

effectively in the hands of the MacMahons as chief tenants. It is unlikely that there was any modification of the territorial structure of the landscape in the first third of the seventeenth century, so that the survey undertaken by Raven records the landscape as it had been for generations under Gaelic control.

Raven mapped the tates in groups of two to six or seven. In some cases hills are shown pictorially, as well as streams, fords, wells, cabins, houses, mills and other buildings. As mentioned above, the maps are also accompanied by a reference list of land-use in each tate. But the interesting aspect of the survey is the detail given on the shape and boundaries of the tates. Though Raven's maps have a variety of north points, they can be compared with the modern Ordnance Survey maps when the latter are rotated to make them more easily comparable (Figs 3 and 4). This exercise was undertaken for a sample of twenty tates. All except nine of the 309 tates in Raven's maps can be identified in the modern townland maps. Examining the configuration of each tate as mapped by Raven, it is evident that even making allowance for deficiencies in surveying techniques, there is a notable correspondence with the modern townlands. In the cases of the dozen places selected in Figs 3 and 4, there is a clear correspondence between tates and townlands.

There have been some local modifications to many of the boundaries in the past three hundred years. Boundaries occasionally may have been adjusted by local agreement in modern times to accommodate permanent new features such as roads; local streams may have been straightened or widened as part of improvement schemes and here too boundaries would have been adjusted in modern times. Name changes, however, are more common than boundary changes, leading to an impression of much more widescale discontinuity between pre- and post-plantation landscapes. Raven's tate maps show that in approximately fifty cases, tates corresponding with modern townland areas were differently named in 1634. In a few cases in Monaghan county, a single named unit today is referred to as two tates in 1591 or 1634 – reflecting a coalescence of units from earlier times. In the modern map, for example, 'Cloghoge and Tievadinna' is represented by one townland. Occasionally, the various sources between 1591 and 1641 refer to tates by name, with 'alias' appended, reflecting the possible impact of changing ownership in earlier generations.

In terms of size and shape and overall geography, the townlands of Monaghan are essentially the same as the tates which were owned and farmed by the MacMahons and their contemporaries in the rural landscapes of the sixteenth century. Consequently we can assume a high level of continuity between the modern townland net and the pre-plantation regime of tates listed for 1591 for Monaghan county. And because the tate spatial order is embedded in a hierarchy of territorial divisions such as ballybetaghs and parishes, the morphology of townlands should provide useful clues about the organisation of Gaelic landscape resources.

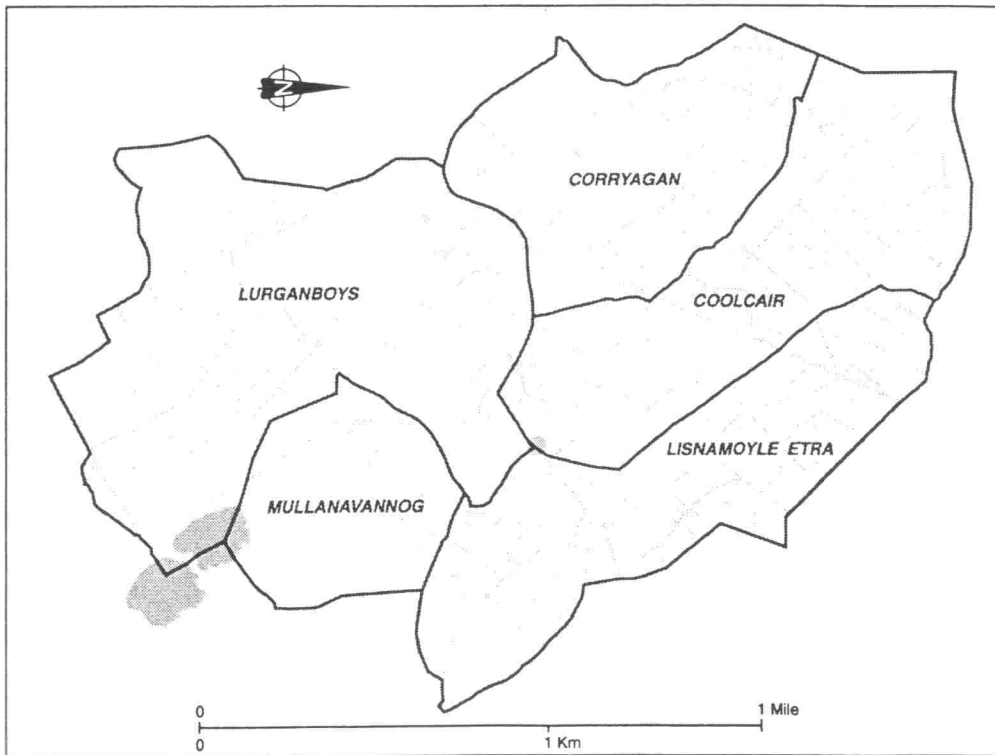
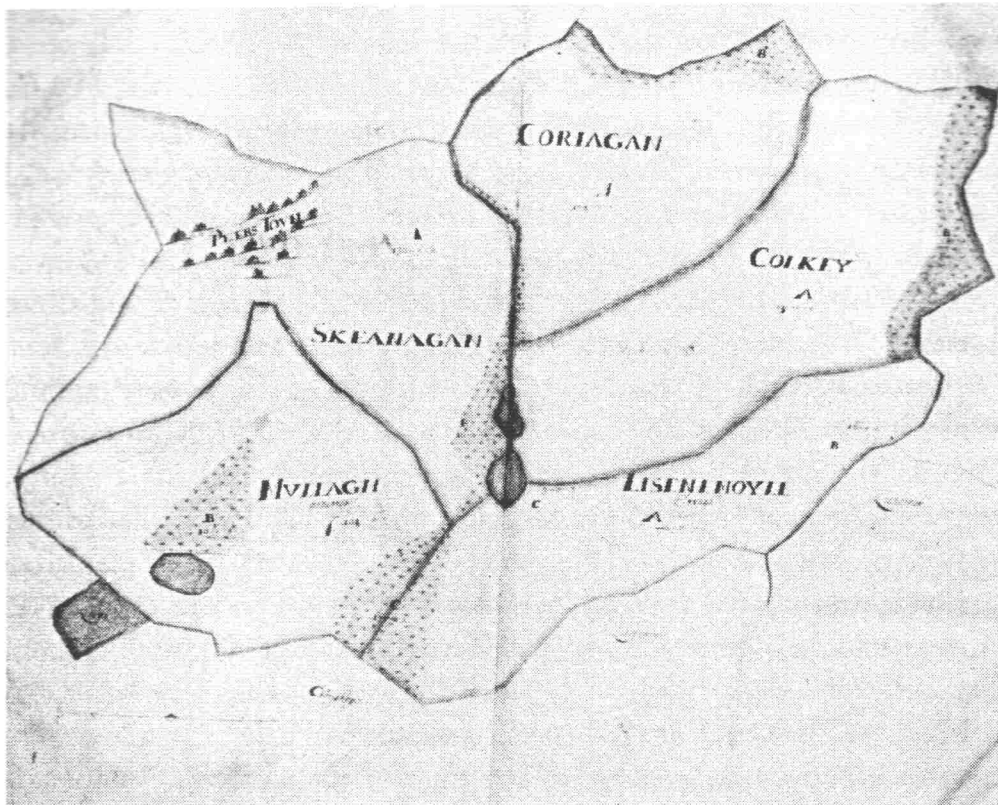


FIG. 3: Tates in 1634 (Raven's Survey), Donaghmoyne parish (by permission of the Marquess of Bath, Longleat House), and modern townlands (Ordnance Survey).

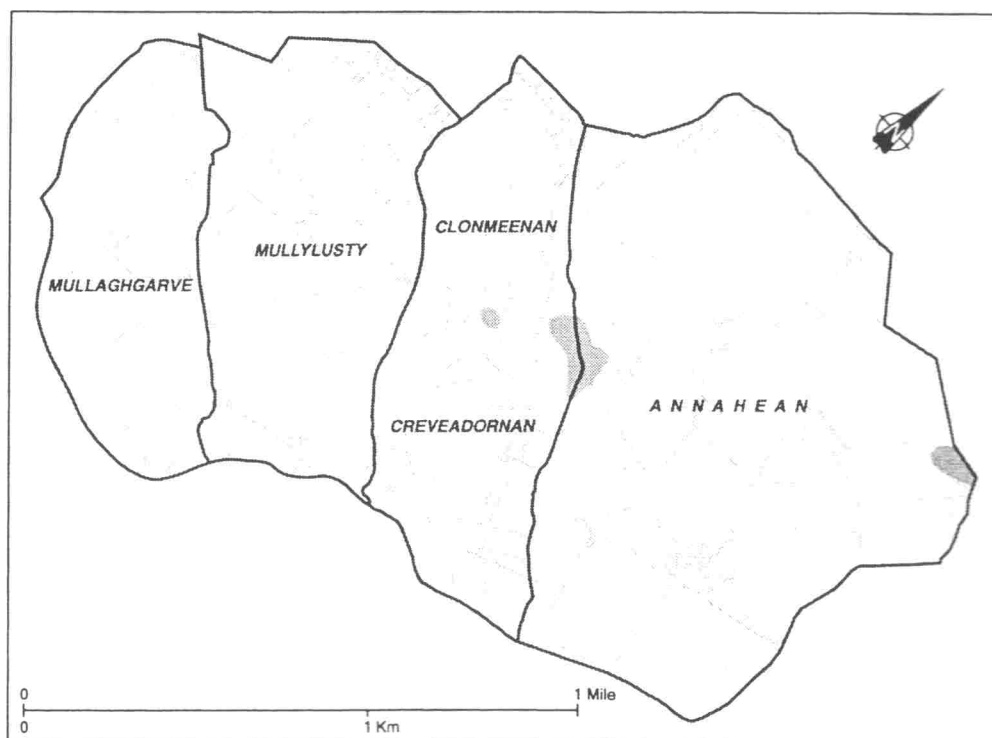
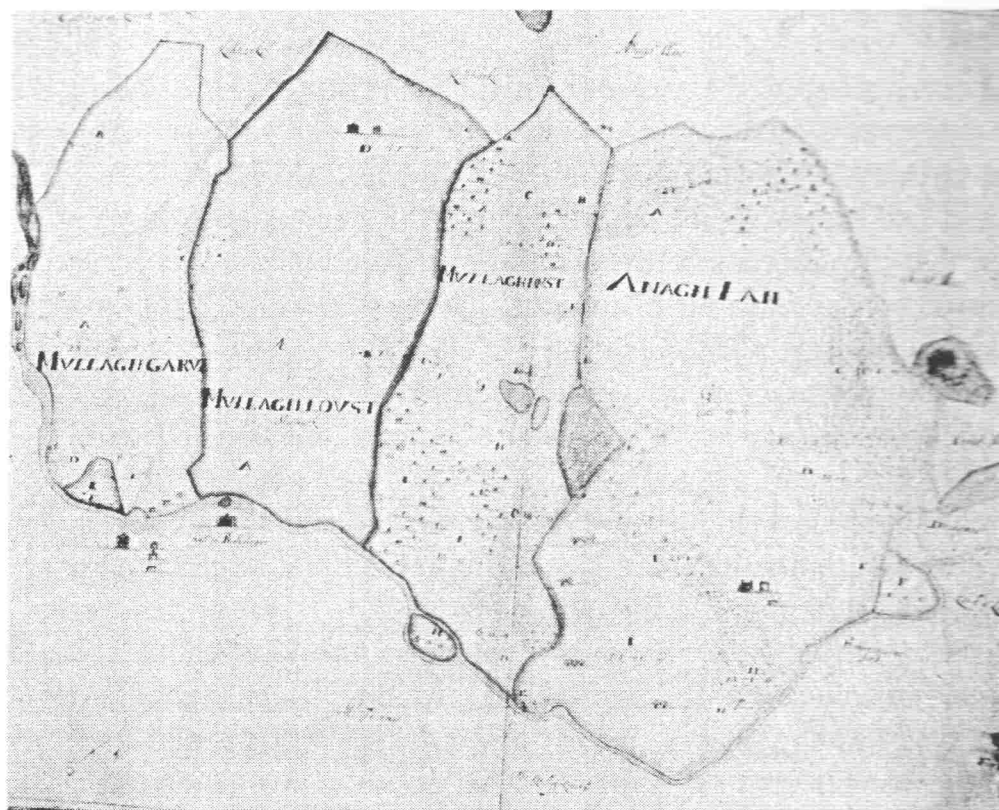


FIG. 4: Tates in 1634 (Raven's Survey), Magheraclone parish (by permission of the Marquess of Bath, Longleat House), and modern townlands (Ordnance Survey).

A TOPOGRAPHICAL GEOMETRY OF TOWNLANDS

Even a casual glance at the map of townlands shows a clear environmental logic in the shape and disposition of townland units. The hilly topography and ecological capacity of the land undoubtedly influenced the spatial network, with each unit encompassing one or two drumlins. Referring to Figs 5 and 6, one can see that the summits of the drumlins or drumlinoid hills normally form the central core of each townland unit. In Fig. 5, townlands of almost equal size nestle into each other, mirroring a landscape which has been described as a 'basket-of-eggs-topography'. In the south Monaghan extract (Fig. 6) larger areas are elongated in a north-west/south-easterly direction reflecting the orientation of the drumlin topography. In all cases the townlands encompass one or two hilltops. These hilltops are the sites for some of the hundreds of raths or ringforts which dot this south Ulster countryside and would have comprised the effective grazing land in the townland.

There is obviously a relationship between the location of these early medieval settlements and the landholding structure, which is manifested in the townland geography. In any process of land division, it would be logical to locate the boundaries to run through the less accessible or useable wetlands between the hills, especially if there was a stream running through them to provide a natural marker. In most cases the townland boundaries follow the course of these small streams which wind in and out around the hills. The lakes which are numerous in many parts of the county also invariably fall on boundaries. Historically, this relationship is evident in the 1634 maps of Thomas Raven where more extensive bog lands are all located on or along the townland boundaries, in some cases with fords or passages marked on the maps, and with what Raven called the 'arable' lands forming the cores. The later Down Survey described this landscape as it appeared in the Fews of south Armagh as consisting of 'currags' [marsh or moor] enclosing 'the small hills wherein the natives live'.¹⁴

The very strong environmental relationship between townlands, hills and intervening wetland boundaries is very evident therefore. This local geometry of townlands also mirrors the range in ecological potential at the larger county or regional level, reflecting the further operation of an environmental logic in territorial order in the former lordship of Airghialla. It was this subtle landscape logic which undid many plantation schemes in sixteenth-century Ireland where surveyors and plantation administrators tried to assign a standard acreage to the small Irish units.¹⁵ But even in Monaghan where there are no

¹⁴ Quoted in W.J. Smyth, 'Society and settlement in seventeenth century Ireland: the evidence of the '1659 census' in W.J. Smyth and K. Whelan (eds.), *Common ground: essays on the historical geography of Ireland* (Cork, 1988), 55-83: 69. ¹⁵ J.H. Andrews, *Plantation acres: an historical study of the Irish land surveyor and his maps* (Omagh, 1985), 13, 39, 57; P. Robinson, *The plantation*



FIG. 5: Townland topography, with hilltops shaded, west Monaghan.

great extremes in land quality, there is a clear significance in the smaller units in the better-endowed northern lowlands and the larger units in the central hills reflecting variations in sensitivities to land values within the former lordship territory. Thus for instance, the average townland size in Tehallen and Donagh parishes (Fig. 2) in the northern lowlands is 104 and 135 acres, while the average in the central upland parishes of Aghnamullen and Muckno is 255 and 276 acres respectively.¹⁶

Lordships in Gaelic Ireland, however, were separate and largely independent entities and there is little point in extending this environmental correlation to larger regions. The 'localisation and fragmentation of authority' means that 'models of rural settlement may well be regionally specific' in Gaelic areas in the medieval period.¹⁷

of Ulster (Dublin, 1984), 85-7. ¹⁶ See also map of townlands in Co. Armagh in F.H.A. Aalen, K. Whelan and M. Stout (eds.), *Atlas of the Irish rural landscape* (Cork, 1997), 21. ¹⁷ T. Barry, 'Late medieval Ireland: the debate on social and economic transformation, 1350-1550' in B.J.

The fact that Monaghan and Fermanagh have the smallest average sizes of townlands in Ireland is not as important as the fact that the townlands in the poorer uplands of Monaghan county are bigger than those in the better-off lowlands. In addition one must take account of possible varying tendencies to fragmentation of tates in different sub-territories within the lordship through the Gaelic period. Thus there are more half tates in Trough barony - ('Dirrery two half tates', 'Gortmony half tate' etc.). The average townland size throughout the county, therefore, is a combination of ecological contrasts in the landscape as well as variable rates of fragmentation in the period before the time of recording. The spatial organisation of the landscape of each lordship was largely integral to the social and demographic imperatives of that territory and independent of broader regional patterns. McErlean also makes the point that the size of Gaelic units often reflected the size of the lordship,¹⁸ much as the size of fields today often reduces with the size of farm.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF BALLYBETAGHS

The ballybetaghs are the lost territorial units of Gaelic landholding in Airghialla which are critical elements in the way the MacMahons organised their land resources. Within a generation of the Gaelic landowners losing their lands through plantation, sale or mortgage, the ballybetagh became obsolete as a spatial entity. Only the smaller tate continued, a process which was common throughout Gaelic Ireland where plantation planners or purchasers of land adopted the unit which was most appropriate for consolidation into estates. Island-wide, the leaseholding units were selected at the lower end of the spatial hierarchy, referred to locally as quarters, ballyboes or tates. Most of the plantation schemes allotted land estates according to the putative potential of 'undertakers' to invest in their proportions, and the lower levels in the Gaelic territorial system allowed greatest manoeuvrability to make up such estates.¹⁹ In Monaghan and elsewhere, the ballybetagh was too large and unwieldy to allow flexibility to construct individual estates. Apart from programmes of deliberate plantation, however, it was market forces which were more important in shaping the emerging landownership structures. In the early seventeenth century, individual freeholders, formerly cemented into kin-groups with collective ownership of the ballybetagh septlands, hived off and sold their tate portions. Although the ballybetagh structure lost its territorial integrity, analysis of the ultimate estates geography which emerged in the

Graham and L.J. Proudfoot (eds.), *An historical geography of Ireland* (London, 1993), 119. See also, M. O'Dowd, *Pomer, politics and land: early modern Sligo 1568-1688* (Belfast, 1991), 69. ¹⁸ McErlean, 'Townland system', 330. ¹⁹ See W.H. Crawford, 'The significance of landed estates in Ulster, 1600-1820' in *Ir. Econ. & Soc. Hist.*, 17 (1990), 44-61: 46-7.

nineteenth century still manages to show residual reflections of the older Gaelic septlands.²⁰

The 1591 and 1606 divisions describe the ballybetagh geography in considerable detail: the sixteen-tate ballybetagh was the norm, with a small number of units comprising four, eight or twelve tates.²¹ In Trough barony (held by MacKennas), there was evidence of considerable numbers of half tates within ballybetaghs in 1591.²² By 1641, when the Gaelic landholding system was under severe pressure, the ballybetagh structure was very fragmented, as evidenced in the *Book of Survey and Distribution (BSD)*. Fig. 7 shows the distribution of c. 100 of these septland estates in the late sixteenth century. An earlier record for 1567 refers to the lordship containing 102 ballybetaghs.²³

The ballybetagh-tate structure was a consequence of the manner in which the land resources were disposed in Gaelic Airghialla in the pre-plantation period. In a system which had parallels elsewhere in Ulster and in the Scottish highlands, the politically dominant families in the lordship or territories within it, divided up their lands among sept branches. In the case of Airghialla, MacMahons were the lordly families and all the lands in most of the baronies were held by MacMahons. Five levels of landownership were identified: the ballybetagh lands of the principal lord's family ('The MacMahon'); the *lucht tige* or mensal lands assessed for provisioning the lord; the demesne ballybetaghs which accompanied the office of lord and were farmed by him, and the ballybetaghs of freeholders from whom the lord was entitled to a range of dues and services. In addition there were church and monastic lands – often consisting of ballybetaghs or half-ballybetaghs which were traditionally free of service to the lord.

The septlands were distributed in ballybetagh estates among sept branches of the MacMahons. Each ballybetagh in turn was subdivided into tates either singly or in groups to form landholding units allotted to individuals or families within the sept. In Farney in 1612, for instance, five ballybetaghs of eighty tates were noted as being divided among nineteen tenants 'all these being of one sept'.²⁴ The detailed names in 1591 (and 1606) suggest this kin-linked structure. Thus, for instance, the ballybetagh of Ballymc.gowne in Monaghan barony was divided among Owen McBreine McMahan (four tates), Hugh McCoverbe McCon McMahan (four tates), Con McGilpatrick McMahan (one tate), Hugh McOwen McBreine McMahan (one tate), Patrick McHugh

20 P.J. Duffy, 'The evolution of estate properties in south Ulster 1600–1900' in W.J. Smyth and K. Whelan (eds.), *Common ground*, 84–109: 104. 21 P.J. Duffy, 'The territorial organisation of Gaelic landownership and its transformation in County Monaghan 1591–1640' in *Irish Geography*, 14 (1981). 22 Outlines of ballybetaghs in the barony of Trough are based on an interpretation by the late Mr Owen Smyth NT of Monaghan. 23 E.P. Shirley, *Some account of the territory or dominion of Farney* (London, 1845), 49. 24 William Smith's survey, Longleat Irish Papers.

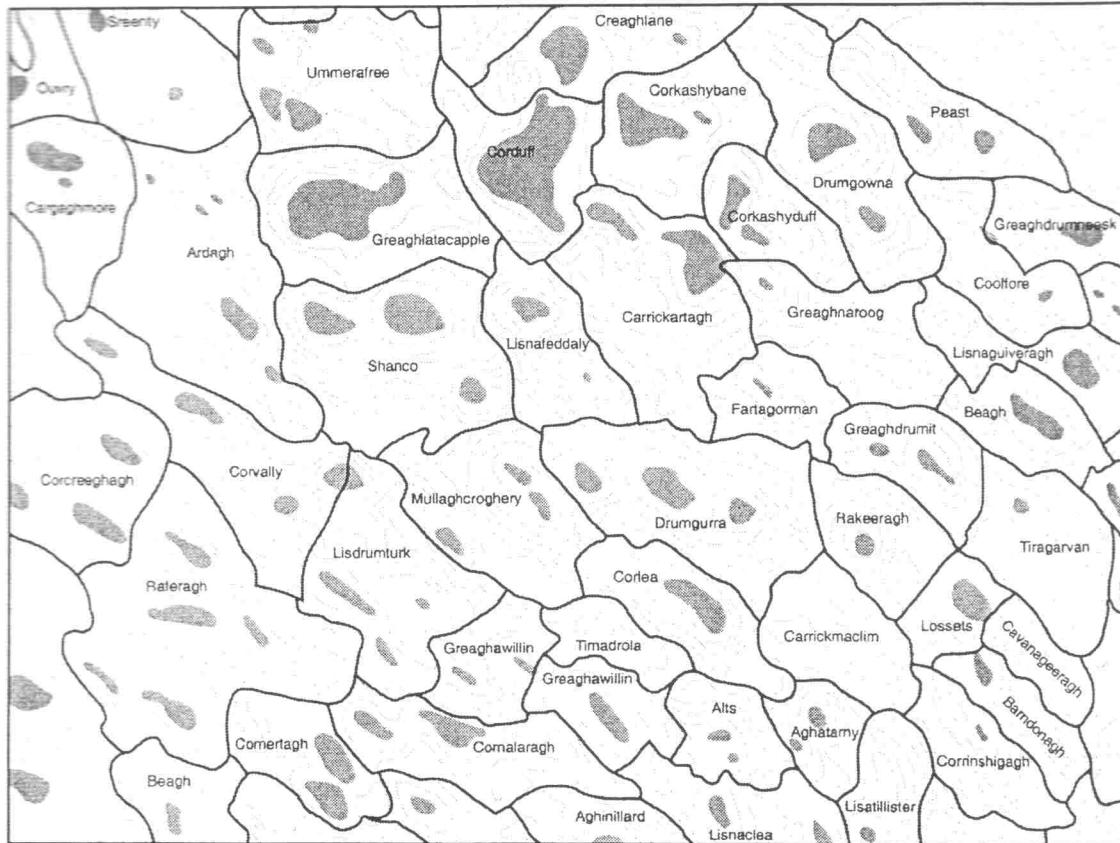


FIG. 6: Townland topography, with hilltops shaded, south Monaghan.

Roe McMahon (two tates), Rory McHugh Roe McMahon (two tates) and Arte McHugh Roe McMahon (two tates). Balledromgowla in Dartrey barony was divided up as follows: Phelim Skippie McMahon (four tates), Hugh Bane (one tate), Patrick McCollo McShane McMahon (one tate), Shane McMahon McHugh Roe (two tates), Breine McHugh Roe McMahon (one tate), Edmonde oge McHugh Roe (one tate), Melaghlin McBrian McMahon (one tate), Shane McHugh McManus McMahon (one tate), Bryan ballagh McHugh McManus McMahon (one tate), Bryan boy McHugh McManus McMahon (one tate), Hugh McGilpatrick McHugh McManus (one tate) and Hugh McBrian McArt McMahon (one tate). In 1591 only eighteen ballybetaghs contained freeholder names other than MacMahon, such as McCabe, McArdle, McQuaide, McKenna, McPhillip, McWard.

The ballybetagh, therefore, represented a territorial device of the lord to economically and politically control their territories – by allocating their lands among branches of client septs or followers – with social objectives which, as Dodgshon has suggested for the Scottish highlands, outweighed non-existent or embryonic market imperatives: these were ‘locally-evolving systems of power which bound space through kinship [and] would have provided a

territorial bonding that outweighed questions of . . . economic cost.²⁵ The ballybetagh was also what might be designated a primary territorial unit, which was subdivided in accordance with the exigencies of population and kinship expansion, into quarters, halves, eighths, twelfths, sixteenths. The ultimate division into sixteenths (tates) allowed the flexibility of combining or later subdividing to accommodate the economic and demographic requirements of the sept. In 1612, Smith noted the significance of the tate as the ultimate landholding unit (and the absence of any distinctive man-made fencing): 'all the land in the Barony lyeth in common without any enclosure, but every tate lyeth by itself together with no other landes within it'.²⁶ It is interesting that in northwest Ulster, including the counties of Donegal, Tyrone, Monaghan, Cavan and Fermanagh, where in pre-plantation times the name 'baile' was ubiquitous in identifying these territorial structures of ballybetaghs, as a place-name element 'baile' is today insignificant.²⁷ In Monaghan there are only eleven townlands out of more than 1,700 containing the element 'bally'. The term clearly had no settlement significance beyond a territorial or spatial unit of landholding²⁸ and vanished as the new landownership regime was put in place in the seventeenth century.

As noted earlier, one of the biggest problems is to reconcile a hypothesis of a fairly well developed territorial system such as this with a small and thinly populated countryside, where labour and tenants were scarce.²⁹ But it is probable that this template of boundaries may have been independent of population size or settlement. If, as suggested by O'Dowd and others,³⁰ control of land was an important aspect of Gaelic lordship, a world of septs assumes a well-defined and well-established network of boundaries and spaces. An emphasis on land control without necessarily an especially large population locked into a market-based economy, might assume a comparatively well developed sense of spatial limits. Strafford's survey in the west of Ireland in 1636-7 recorded the detailed territorial claims and divisions of even very marginal lands.³¹

The well-established legacy of ballybetaghs and tates in Farney supported a comparatively thin population in 1634; indeed extensive parts of the barony were uninhabited, with many ballybetaghs having little more than one cabin.³²

25 R.A. Dodgshon, *From chiefs to landlords: social and economic change in the western highlands and islands, c.1493-1820* (Edinburgh, 1998), 13. 26 William Smith's survey. 27 See T. Jones Hughes, 'Town and baile in Irish place-names' in N. Stephens and R.E. Glasscock (eds.), *Irish geographical studies in honour of E. Estyn Evans* (Belfast, 1970), 244-58. 28 This was emphasised by Nicholls, 'Gaelic society and economy', 407. 29 K. Nicholls, *Land, law and society in sixteenth century Ireland* (Cork, 1976), 9. 30 M. O'Dowd, 'Land inheritance in early modern Sligo' in *Ir. Econ. & Soc. Hist.*, 10 (1983), 5-18; Dodgshon, *Chiefs to landlords*, 31-78. 31 J.M. Graham, 'Rural society in Connacht 1600-1640' in N. Stephens and R.E. Glasscock (eds.), *Irish geographical studies* (Belfast, 1970), 192-208:194. 32 Duffy, 'Farney in 1634', 248-54.

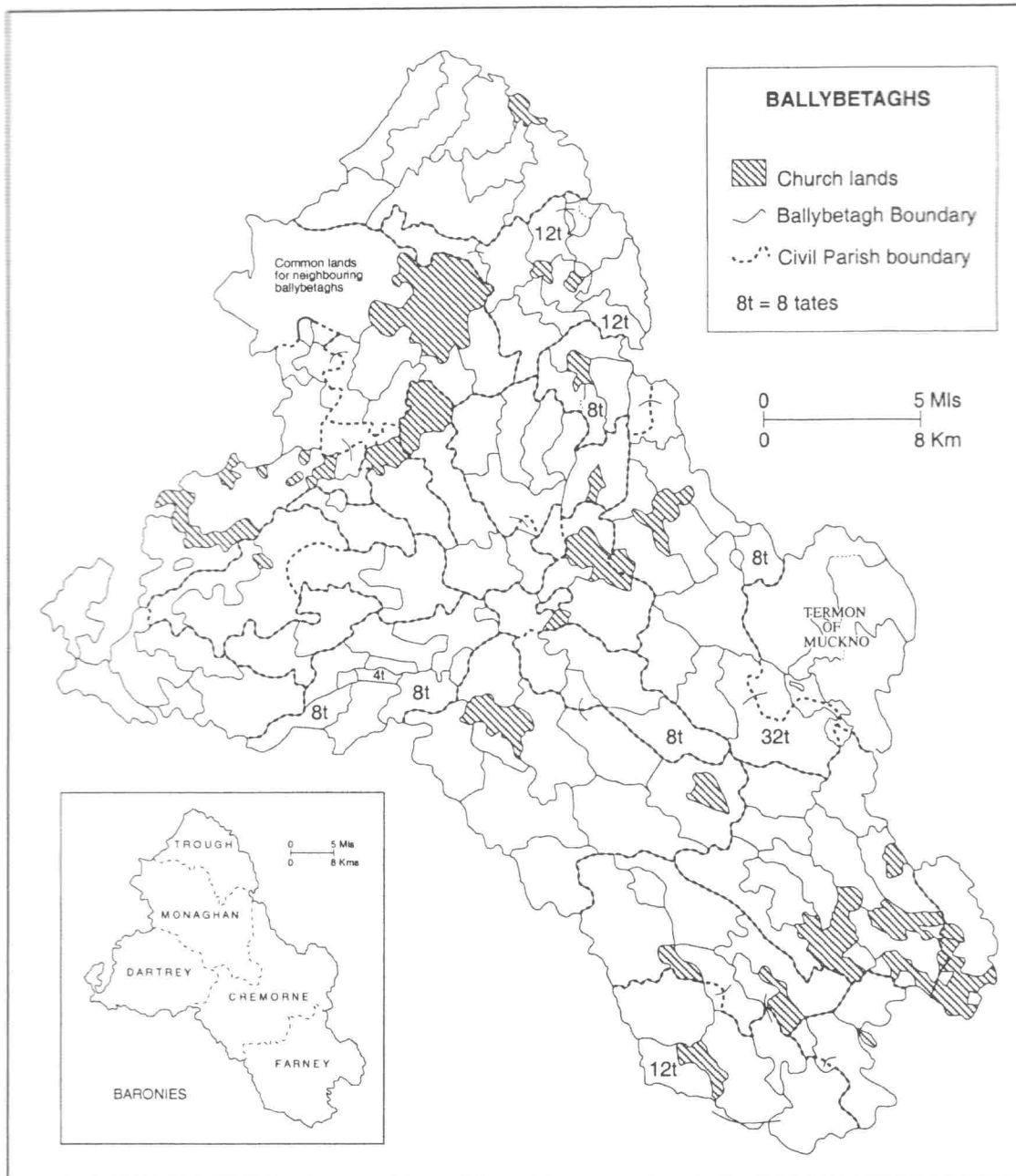


FIG. 7: Ballybetaghs in Co. Monaghan.

If the evidence of Farney in 1634 is to be believed, the settlement pattern and built environment in the Monaghan area was relatively underdeveloped. Tower houses were fewer in south Ulster than in more southerly regions, and rare in the Monaghan area. Raven's 1634 maps show a mainly cabin landscape in Farney, with few stone houses. Ever McColla, one of the chief MacMahons in the late sixteenth century, lived in an undistinguished house, if Raven's drawing of it is credible. William Smith's 1612 survey of Farney provides a general description of the houses of the Irish as being 'of no reckoning, but for

the most part built of roddes and covered with turves . . .³³ Such a landscape of insubstantial houses may have facilitated a mobile population; by the middle of the seventeenth century, for example, there is evidence of considerable local mobility between 'adjacent townlands, neighbouring parishes or across parish boundaries in an adjoining barony',³⁴ a continuation of earlier practices perhaps.

Smith's 1612 survey also hints that settlement in the barony was clustered, characterising it as consisting of so many 'towns'. Magheross parish had twenty 'towns' called after twenty 'gentlemen' listed by name; Donaghmoyné also had twenty. These were the head tenants of larger landholders, 'strong' men who would have been responsible for the rent and cess for their districts and on whom the other inhabitants would have depended economically and socially. In the larger tenancies of Farney, such as those of Ever McColla or Redmond McRory who held large numbers of tates, there must have been many of these head tenants acting as their sub-tenants.³⁵ Many of the larger tenants may have worked some of the tate 'farms' as untenanted grazing properties for cows. The numbers of 'gentlemen' listed in 1612 tally approximately with the evidence of small cabin clusters in the later 1634 survey, few of them with more than a half dozen cabins (see Andrews, this volume). There is no relationship between these settlements and ballybetagh names. The ballybetagh, therefore, identified a territorial unit which had landholding significance only, within which were clustered settlements that were distinguished by the headmen or 'gentlemen' of the septs. The early seventeenth-century pardons provide contemporary English terminology which purports to represent the perceived structure of Gaelic landholding: gentlemen (landholding farmers), yeoman (large tenants), husbandmen (small tenants), horsemen and kern (a military service class) and others like labourers.³⁶

The evidence for corn-growing agriculture is limited – though there were five mills in Farney in 1634. Cows were a principal form of capital and it seems certain that the territorial structure was necessary in the management of these large herds. Herds of 3–5000 cows were frequently taken as prey in the sixteenth century in Farney and south Ulster territories.

While the lordship of Airghialla was divided among the principal branches

33 'Smith's survey of Farney, 1612'. 34 W.J. Smyth, reviewing S.T. Carleton, *Heads and hearths: the hearth money rolls and poll tax returns for county Antrim*, in *Ir. Econ. & Soc. Hist.*, 20 (1993), 112; comparison of Thomas Raven's 1634 picture with the details from the 1665 hearthmoney rolls shows about 50 townlands which depopulated in the intervening thirty years.

35 I am grateful to Kenneth Nicholls for these observations. This landholding system was adopted and continued by immigrant settlers in Farney into the seventeenth century. See N. Canny, 'Migration and opportunity: Britain, Ireland and the new world' in *Ir. Econ. Soc. Hist.*, 12 (1985), 7–32: 18. 36 See O'Dowd, *Power, politics and land*, 86; L.P. Murray, *The parish of Creggan* (Dundalk, 1940), 20–2; Canny, 'Migration and opportunity', discusses the continuance of Gaelic land-use and landholding structures in planted areas of Ulster.

of the MacMahons and MacKennas in the sixteenth century, in relation to the land of the lordship it would seem that most of the mobility over the previous century or two was a mobility of ownership. Expansion from the top by the lordly families, displacement of less influential kin-groups down through the landholding structures, and ultimately their marginalisation both economically and literally occurred within the parameters of the ballybetaghs. In this way, a stable – even territorially quite sophisticated – spatial network was necessary, supporting a fair degree of landholding mobility.

Apart from the structure or pattern of the sixteen-tate subdivisions of the ballybetaghs, is there any other evidence of a spatial order in the geography of ballybetaghs? Do they, for example, demonstrate any evidence of an equitable allocation of land and environmental resources? Even within the limited ecological range in Airghialla, upland, lowland, water sources and river meadows were important resources, as was access to the lord's chief settlement. Thus, for instance, the ballybetaghs often extended upwards to the highlands and downwards to the lowlands incorporating a range of potential land-uses.³⁷ This is evident in Farney where the ballybetaghs are arranged in a north-west–southeast orientation extending downslope from the uplands in the centre. Similarly in the central upland region the extensive ballybetaghs run downhill into the well-drained lowlands. In the barony of Trough in the northern extremity of the county, the ballybetaghs extend into the valley of the Blackwater river and upslope to the flank of Slieve Beagh. In the west county districts they stretch down to the meadows of the river Finn.

PARISH ORIGINS

Understanding the parish geography in Airghialla is critically important to understanding the overall evolution of secular Gaelic territorial structures. The parishes represent a structure which was midway between the ballybetagh and barony. And though the parish had no landholding function, its size made it a convenient unit for local administrative purposes ensuring its survival as an important feature in all the surveys of landownership in the seventeenth century. In the *BSD* for Monaghan, the parishes form the principal statistical unit, within which the residual ballybetagh structures were identified. With a number of minor modifications, the civil parishes represent the late medieval parishes (see Fig. 2). Changes made in the eighteenth century by the Church of Ireland echo much earlier established medieval lines in the landscape.³⁸

³⁷ For Donegal, see J. Graham, 'South-west Donegal in the seventeenth century' in *Irish Geography*, 6 (1970), 136–52: 141. ³⁸ P. J. Duffy, *Landscapes of south Ulster: a parish atlas of the dioceses of Clogher* (Belfast, 1993), 4–10.

Thus, for instance, while Ematrix parish was only created in 1738, it was clearly prefigured in the ballybetaghs of the sixteenth century. Similarly Killeevan and Currin parishes were established in the eighteenth century, but their boundaries follow much older territorial divisions represented in the ballybetaghs. Undoubtedly of course these older units are significant primary divisions which coincide with major streams as natural boundaries.

In many ways, the link between religious and secular territories had been a reality for hundreds of years. It was clearly evident in the overall relationship between the parishes and the ballybetaghs in Airghialla. In virtually every case the historic parish boundaries were coterminous with the ballybetagh boundaries as they were recorded in the late sixteenth century.³⁹ Thus, for instance, the parish of Aghnamullen consisted of eight ballybetaghs in 1591: Ballenlogh, Ballenecrave, Ballereogh, Ballerawer, Balleneveaghan, Ballintamlaght, Ballenney and Balleportnave. Donagh parish consisted of the ballybetaghs of Ballydrombanchor, Balleglaslagh, Balliclanwoyde, Balledromarall, 'The twelve tates', Ballilattin, Ballilegacorry, Ballynesmere, Ballyclonard (Fig. 7). Ní Ghabhláin⁴⁰ suggests that Duffy's maps of landownership in 1591 indicate a close relationship between the septlands and the parishes, which seems tenable for 1591 in the sense that parishes often appeared to coincide with groups of kin-linked ballybetaghs. This, of course, would imply that the disposition of lands by septs remained stable for very long periods of time.

As a consequence of the link between these two intermediate units of territory, understanding the origins of the parishes might help to shed some light on the genesis of the ballybetaghs. Otway-Ruthven was one of the first to draw attention to the close connection between the Norman manorial process in twelfth-century Ireland and the formation of parishes.⁴¹ This was an extension of a European tradition which found expression in the twelfth-century reforms in Ireland, with the establishment of the dioceses mirroring the political order at the time. Parishes were established after the formation of the dioceses and research is continuing to shed light on this process. That the pace of parish formation was quite rapid in Anglo-Norman areas makes sense, as they were based on already established secular manorial estates. It is possible in turn that the geography of manorial estates was strongly influenced by pre-existing Gaelic units of landholding.

The paucity of sources on Gaelic areas makes it difficult to demonstrate a

³⁹ Duffy, 'Territorial organisation', 7; *Landscapes of south Ulster*, 12. For an earlier discussion see P. Power, 'The bounds and extent of Irish parishes' in S. Pender (ed.), *Féilscribhinn Torna* (Cork, 1947), 218–23. ⁴⁰ S. Ní Ghabhláin, 'The origins of medieval parishes in Gaelic Ireland: the evidence from Kilfenora' in *JRSAI*, 126 (1996), 37–61: 52. ⁴¹ A.J. Otway-Ruthven, 'Parochial development in the rural deanery of Skreen' in *JRSAI*, 94 (1964), 112–22; see also M. Hennessy, 'The Anglo-Norman colony in county Tipperary c.1185–1540'. Unpublished PhD thesis (University College, Dublin, 1998).

similar connection with Gaelic territorial order in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but such a link must be a viable hypothesis. Episcopal correspondence with Rome is predictably mainly concerned with diocesan business, with parishes being identified by name only. There is no reference to the internal arrangements of parishes. The 1307 papal taxation lists the parishes for the diocese of Clogher and the following parishes are recorded for the Co. Monaghan area: Donagh, Clones, Galloon, Kilmore and Drumsnat, Tydavnet, Tyholland, Donaghmoynne, Magheracloone, Magheross, Iniskeen, Killanny, Muckno and Cremourne.⁴² Galloon and Cremourne represent primary parishes, in the sense suggested by Ní Ghabhláin, hinting at a further stage of territorialisation with subdivisions along the lines of the ballybetagh boundaries. Whether this suggests that the ballybetaghs developed subsequently in this region, or were simply not used to define smaller parishes at this early stage, is impossible to say. Galloon was divided into the later parishes of Killeevan, Aghabog, Currin, and Ematrix; Cremourne was subdivided into Clontibret, Aghnamullen and Tullycorbet.

The parish geography is an important indicator, providing circumstantial evidence of the early existence of the ballybetaghs. Claval has adverted to the remarkable stability of territorial structures in traditional societies due to hierarchical structures being linked to the local lord or the church.⁴³ Most of the parishes, and by implication, their associated ballybetaghs were in existence in the early fourteenth century and it is likely that there was considerable inbuilt inertia in the parish boundaries over the years. Parishes represented important sources of revenue for the church, whose bureaucracy in Ireland and in Rome carefully managed and maintained the system. In view of the practice of twelfth-century parish formation, therefore, it is clear that the ballybetaghs were already an established fact in the landscape and that their boundaries were probably fixed for a long time.

As in manorial regions, parishes in Gaelic Irish regions took account of existing political and secular realities (like lordship) as well as existing earlier monastic territories. So parishes were probably formed within a century of the establishment of the dioceses, and like the dioceses they had boundary associations with earlier established units. In this way, the parishes form an important key to the formation and morphology of territorial order in the Gaelic lordship, because in the absence of any information on this process before the sixteenth century, the reasonably definite formation of parishes some centuries earlier is an important clue to its origins.

⁴² S. Ó Dufaigh, 'The Mac Cathmhaoils of Clogher' in *Clogher Record*, 2 (1957), 25-49:47, 48.

⁴³ P. Claval, *An introduction to regional geography* (Oxford, 1993), 214.

CONCLUSION

It is possible to conceptualise an architecture of Gaelic institutional structures in Airghialla, reflected in feudal relations of lord, demesne lands and freeholder estates which were embedded in a territorial hierarchy of tates, ballybetaghs and baronies. Captured in the maps and surveys of the early seventeenth century, the modern townlands are accurate records of the geography of late medieval tates. Boundaries and landed space in the medieval Monaghan area remained stable over a long period of time. Parish geography in the fourteenth century suggests the prior existence of secular landholding units in the ballybetaghs. Some earlier very extensive parishes imply a process of subdivision of earlier territorial entities into manageable septlands, which then remained as the stable currency of the lordship. Continuity of landholding structures is implicit in the continuity of associated parish territories.

This nested hierarchy of spaces was, therefore, present for a long time. There probably were changes over earlier generations as the kinship structure expanded and landownership changed hands. When change did take place it is likely that it occurred within the lattice of tates and ballybetaghs which coalesced and divided accordingly. Indeed changes of ownership could only easily occur within a relatively stable territorial structure. The interlinkage between tates, ballybetaghs and parishes guaranteed the endurance of these structures. In Airghialla, stability of landownership under the MacMahons from the middle of the fifteenth century provided further continuity in territorial geography, with change among different branches of septs being suggested in some units having different names at different times. Thus for instance, Ballenecorrely in 1591 was also known as Ballimcturlagh in the BSD. Ballenra was Ballycaslane in 1606. Ballevickenally was also known as Balliduffy; the half ballybetagh of Cornebrock alias half ballybetagh of Cargagh; Balleglanka was also known as Balliclerian. As with the smaller tates, spatial expansion or contraction was accommodated in terms of half ballybetaghs (or tates) or quarter ballybetaghs, dividing and coalescing as needed. The integrity of the ballybetagh boundaries, like the tate boundaries, once established in the customary memory of the community, remained stable.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to thank James Keenan, Senior Technician in the Department of Geography, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, for the care with which he produced the accompanying maps.