Chapter 27

Unwritten Landscapes: Reflections on Minor Place-names and Sense of Place in the Irish Countryside

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> The names of a land show the heart of a race;
> They move on the tongue like the lilt of a song.
> You say the name and I see the place —
> Drumbo, Dungannon, or Annalong ...[1]

Place-names have a highly respected lineage in traditional historical and landscape studies. They have been seen to provide important indicators of settlement and landscape change from the past, as well as evidence about the peoples and cultures that occupied such landscapes: 'Irish placenames are spots in time as well as space, palimpsests in which a whole disrupted history lies waiting to be deciphered'.[2] The notion of a 'palimpsest of landscape', which is frequently invoked by geographers, encompasses the idea of the landscape as consisting of layers of material and cultural accretions and modifications over time. 'Reading the landscape' and the idea of 'landscape-as-text' have clear connotations for older and newer geographies. The palimpsest, with its relict and continuing artefacts, also consists of layers of meaning, in recurring sequences of interpretations, contestations and representations in the past and present. This essay focuses on place-names as one aspect of meaning and understanding in landscape. Some general discussion of landscape and place will be followed by a more detailed analysis of the extent and importance of names, especially minor names, in readings of landscape in Ireland.

Primacy of landscape: place and identity

The focus on landscape and place in this discussion is principally a rural one, emphasising the primacy of landscape and sense of place in many people's lives. Remembering is a distinctive human experience, and place and landscape form a universal material and

physical context for memory. Remembering is a notably spatial experience: here I grew up, there I went to school, here I made my childhood friends, there my family/parents are buried. One could say that growing into adulthood is like climbing a hierarchy of ever more distant locations and places which are the settings of our pasts. Our earliest memories are about the spatial learning process, when we have our first practical exercises at home in distance, scale and location. Séamus Heaney has graphically invoked this essentially place-anchored experience when he speaks of how inherited objects transmit the climate of a lost world:

> The rooms where we come to consciousness, the cupboards we open as toddlers, the shelves we climb up to ... the secret spots we come upon in our earliest solitudes out of doors, the haunts of our first explorations in outbuildings and fields at the verge of our security.... At such moments we have our first inklings of pastness and find our physical surroundings invested with a wider and deeper dimension.[3]

This is very much a particular rendition of the power of landscape and place, especially local place, in our lives. In talking of the importance of local landscapes like this we are talking of a kind of organic link between landscape and communities, growing up and into their places, which have tangible form, scale and texture, manifested in material elements of landscape like houses and buildings, fields, farms and road networks, but also more immaterial considerations such as place-names and family names.

This primacy of landscape is best observed in people's search for roots, for family identity. Relating an experience familiar to many Irish-Americans, two brothers from Manchester recently described a journey they made to visit the village their grandmother had left in Romania at the beginning of the twentieth century.[4] They had grown up with their father's story about the long journey across Europe and about the place he left behind as a small child. It was the manner in which they described their visit that signalled the significance of landscape in our lives: they 'discovered' their identity when they saw their grandfather's grave, the village with its unpaved streets, the railway where their grandmother had started her journey, the houses and villages on the roadside, the fields where she had worked almost a century before. It was as if they were being introduced to their long-lost relatives who had occupied, lived in and moved through this landscape. The material place became a touchstone and territorial expression of memory and human identity. Touching the stones, the

walls, the furniture of their ancestral landscape became an emotional experience that seems almost akin to people meeting their birth mother for the first time.

These ideas embrace sentiments that straddle an older absolutist, bounded and territorial conception of place, which may be increasingly rare today when much attention has been focused on attenuation of the local and erosion of the sense of place. Twenty-five years ago, Relph talked about the way cultural globalisation and increased mobility changed the relationship between people and place. Most urban societies have created a series of deterritorialised landscapes or what Relph called 'inauthentic places', 'universal wastelands ... we have subjected ourselves to the forces of placelessness and are losing our sense of place ...'.[5] Tuan talked at the same time about knowing a place in an abstract way as points in a spatial system, and in an emotional and connected way that he claimed was increasingly rare.[6] And Massey has most recently talked about places as multiple, fluid and uncertain entities shaped by 'power geometries' in a globalising world.[7]

Intellectually it is possible to identify with Massey's ideas, but viscerally to believe in the continuing endurance of bounded space and place. Most people have an instinct to 'belong', to affiliate with a particular place. It is difficult to belong 'everywhere'. In Relph's words, 'to have roots in a place is to have a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp of one's own position in the order of things, and a significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular'.[8]

This essay hovers between an older positivist legacy of cultural landscape studies and a later humanistic tradition in geography that blurs into a more recent post-modernist concern with landscape-as-text, with language and meaning. The first has continued from the 1960s and is reflected, for example, in the work of the Group for the Study of Irish Historic Settlement, the Standing European Conference for the Study of Rural Landscape and recent publications by historical geographers in Ireland.[9] In these instances, the focus remains on landscape as object, landscape as container of cultural artefacts, which 'is allowed to speak to its skilled interpreters as hard or factual evidence'.[10] Based on the work of Carl Sauer in the U.S.A., W. G. Hoskins in England and Estyn Evans in Ireland, all were concerned with 'reading the landscape', especially its material expression, for clues to its cultural evolution. Hoskins described his approach in surprisingly modern idiom, but within an essentially empiricist frame: 'everything I was looking at was saying something to me if only I could recognise the language. It was a landscape written in a kind of code'.[11] As the

historian and expert, it was his job to 'decode' its meaning.

Recent work is based on the assumption that there is more to landscape than meets the eye. Mitchell points to the 'role of language and discourse in producing cultural spaces ... and the way in which landscapes and places are more than just congeries of material artifacts or empty containers awaiting social action',[12] partly hinted at in Meinig's earlier assessment that 'landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but also what lies in our heads'.[13] Landscape and place may thus be seen as socially-constructed entities, not just objects but subjects in their physical manifestation and metaphysical meaning. So Cosgrove and others have talked about landscape as a 'way of seeing' the world,[14] linking with the idea of landscape as a text to be read (at different times and by different people in different ways) for meaning and explanation.

Meaning is explicated through language. Language may be defined as a series of signs and symbols with agreed meanings. It has grammar and syntax, dialect and accent, all reflecting agreed conventional ways of communicating messages and meaning. In a way, landscape (texts) can be understood only through the language of words, or 'data' of some sort: how else would we understand it? How else would we 'read' it or 'write' it? In this sense there are a variety of representations of landscape that convey meaning through, for example, the 'linguistic' conventions of painting, poetry, photography, maps and, most obviously, through literature itself. In the latter context, Sheeran has argued that places and landscapes can be seen as narrative constructions by writers, which often become more real than reality itself: 'Land and place are made up of language as much as, if not more than, they are made of earth and buildings'.[15] Without Yeats, for example, Innisfree would be a nameless place. But even the layout and structure of landscape itself, and its material expression in shapes and content, is a system of signs and symbols with meaning, that is, a 'language'. Archaeologist Tadhg O'Keeffe has examined how in medieval townscapes in Ireland, 'urban space is negotiated by understanding what its components "mean" ...'.[16] One could suggest, for instance, that we 'keep off the grass' in urban parks, we enter houses through doors not windows, because we 'know' the language of the landscape.

Much knowledge of landscape takes place through the 'language' of territories and spatial order. What we may call a process of 'territorialisation' is expressed in the designation and naming of territorial structures (generic and particular). This is an essential part of the vocabulary of landscape that we take for granted today, as we take for granted the words we use in everyday communications. How

could we understand where we live in the Irish countryside, for example, if it did not have, at a generic level, 'townlands' or 'parishes', 'farms' and 'fields', 'streets' and 'fair greens' in towns and villages — all, of course, with individual and culturally-distinctive names? More recent additions to this vocabulary in newly-emerging suburban landscapes like 'Downs', 'Grove', 'The Meadows', 'The Cloisters', are replete with social meaning, where landscape is used to construct an artificial sense of rurality, community or place.

This idea of language and structure of landscape is made most meaningful when one experiences a 'strange' landscape, which in many ways is akin to listening to a different language. Twenty years ago, this writer's consciousness was disorientated by the differences observed in the wide open Canterbury plain in New Zealand, with its unfamiliar elements — absence of hedges and trees, and the presence of purple, yellow and blue tin roofs of the timber-built rural farmhouses. One weekend in New Plymouth (a confusing message in this name also), 'hedges' and 'fields' were encountered for the first time in months, which was like hearing the familiar rhythms of familiar tunes, though on closer inspection the hedges were formed of flax and other unfamiliar plants. Similarly, one thinks of the discordant experience of New England with its familiar names in an 'alien' landscape — names that represent attempts three centuries ago by English and Irish immigrants to articulate their landscape in a more familiar idiom.

Place-names and landscape heritage: 'ways of seeing'

> 'Where are we going, sir?'
> 'It's a place called Map Ref. 517412 ... a grove of ancient olive trees.'[17]

There is a certain irony in combining an 'ancient' place with such a placeless representation, a dramatic illustration of Relph's inauthentic sense of place, perhaps. The inside view of the settled, rural, perhaps even pre-capitalist community with its organic, embedded-in-the-landscape, local sense of place, can be contrasted with the outside, (post)-modern, fleeting, distanciated view, exemplified best in commodified senses of place, generated especially by tourism. The first view has been largely eclipsed in Ireland in the past generation. Nobody walks the landscape anymore, as Michael Viney has observed:

> Flocks of sheep that, twenty years ago, were driven past the gate by a man and a dog now proceed routinely ahead of the

farmer's car (the dog, on occasion, riding in the passenger seat). The end of manual turf-cutting ... has cancelled a whole seasonal procession between the townlands and the bog.[18]

There is a much-reduced connectedness with the landscape of farms and fields and laneways.

Spike Milligan's comic recollection of the military's naming and claiming of landscapes in Tunisia during World War II is a metaphor for the purely transitory functional knowledge of tourist outsiders. Motorwayed landscapes, which are now engulfing many parts of Ireland, are examples of disconnected, fleeting-place knowledge, where 'Celbridge' and other places are associated with little more than another piece of landscaped central reservation. According to Linda McDowell, 'identity is not place specific' anymore, 'the locality in a strictly geographical sense plays no part in sense of self. Style is cosmopolitan, not local ... '.[19] Western Parkway, Westlink and Southern Cross, for instance, are essentially rapid transit landscapes for travellers around Dublin. On French autoroutes, landscape renditions are most dramatically represented by sequences of large brown signs with simplified pictorial representations of regions of *châteaux*, 'forests' or 'medieval churches', creating a kaleidoscope of intangible places that flash past the traveller hurtling through France.

Naming the landscape must be seen as a fundamental exercise in allocating meaning to place: in the words of Henry Glassie, 'space becomes time as people turn earth into landscape and claim it with names'.[20] In reading the Irish landscape, therefore, the names on places are an essential part of their placeness. For this reason, the Irish townland (of which there are more than 60,000) has been a cornerstone of landscape studies by geographers and historians for many years.[21] One of the distinctive characteristics of the Irish landscape-as-text is the narrative quality of Irish toponymy. The *Dinnseanchas* is the body of place-name lore that exploits a narrative imagination of place in origin stories and myths.[22] One of the greatest students of Irish place-names was John O'Donovan, who worked for the Ordnance Survey in the nineteenth century and remains an important authority on the meanings and significance of Irish names, not least because he ranged over virtually the whole island.[23] Ironically also of course, his monumental work for the Ordnance Survey was aimed at standardising modern anglicised renditions of the Gaelic names, with important cultural repercussions for place consciousness in today's Ireland.

The landscape-as-text trope is useful with regard to place-names in the sense implied by Barnes and Duncan,[24] that texts are read and

rewritten as they are read, so communicating and reproducing meanings that vary through time and cultural transitions. One of the notable things about place-names in the Irish landscape is the disjunction in the relationship between the named landscape and its inhabitants today. 'A farmer with no Irish', suggested a friend of Michael Viney, 'is a stranger in his own land'.[25] The great majority of Irish place-name meanings, however, are probably no longer accessible to the average inhabitant whose mother tongue has been English for several generations, a loss of memory and meaning that has been appropriately expressed by the poet John Montague: 'The whole landscape a manuscript/We had lost the skill to read,/A part of our past disinherited …'.[26] Thomas Kinsella has written most on this theme of discontinuity in Irish/Gaelic culture and modern 'estrangement from place and a consequent defamiliarisation of placeness'.[27] Attenuated and distorted memories of meaning live on in many communities, and over the past century official institutions of state have attempted to reshape and fix meanings arising from the ideological priorities that have attached to the Irish language.

The townlands and their names, however, remain as critical elements in local identity. Their continuing use as postal addresses has ensured their survival as living expressions of place. Their bundling into parishes and association with local sporting allegiances through a vibrant Gaelic Athletic Association, for example, has consolidated their endurance. So, in spite of frequent lack of comprehension of literal meaning, the names have resounding local, social and cultural significance. Even if the Irish language is no longer a familiar everyday language of the people, undoubtedly the euphony of place-name and its local pronunciation as a shadow of the older disconnected language is embedded in local consciousness. The sounds of the names — 'that sigh like a pressed melodeon' across the landscape, in the words of John Montague[28] — are frequently invoked by local song-writers and poets as signifiers of locality or of local identity. Séamus Heaney captured this significance of 'townland' when he first saw the word written down in a poem by John Hewitt: 'the fume of affection and recognition that came off the word when I saw it written down on official paper (so to speak) was altogether verifying … something like a premonition of demarginalisation passed over me …'.[29] Clearly he viewed it as an affirmation of local landscape and sense of place. Though they are important parts of local rurality, often appearing exotic to urbanites, townland names have, of course, endured in the city as well. Ballymun, Finglas, Drumcondra, Cabra, Glasnevin, Drimnagh, Crumlin in Dublin, and Shankill, Falls, Ardoyne, Finaghy, Glengormley, Knockbreda, Ligoniel

in Belfast, are all names that resound with meaning today in quite different social contexts.

In many ways these local names and spaces are experiencing a renaissance as part of a broad turnaround in the inexorable globalisation process of the past few decades. The local texture of life has been inverted from a rich intimacy of detail that was characteristic up to half a century ago, to a much more globalised world. This was epitomised in the way the Northern Ireland post office abandoned townland addresses more than twenty years ago in the interests of modern efficiency, a move that resulted in a vigorous backlash by local communities and organisations. The academic revival of interest in local history and local studies in many parts of Ireland is a manifestation of a burgeoning popular interest in the local — in local culture and environment, local community, genealogy and history. This has partly been driven by a rising need to buttress local identity and local diversity in a globalising world, by an interest in the embeddedness of locally-produced food, crafts and music, and partly by European Union- and tourism-generated community development programmes.

Within the highly localised template of townlands lie hidden layers of minor names that continue to have significance for local community heritage and are being rediscovered as part of the general resurrection of the local. Referring especially to names in the Irish language, Ó Muraíle has described it as 'an astonishingly rich substratum of microtoponymy still surviving … [in forms that are] utterly undisguised and undistorted'.[30] He notes that 7,500 such names have been recorded for Co. Kerry, 1,600 from the three western parishes in Cork county, 1,400 from the Gaeltacht parish of Ring in Co. Waterford, 1,100 from two parishes in west Donegal, 800 from one townland in north Mayo and so on. Ó Muraíle has collected more than 600 micro-names on Clare Island in Clew Bay, over 600 from a dozen townlands in Tourmakeady Gaeltacht and 500 in Achill Island. The study of the 850-acre townland of Kilgalligan in the remote corner of north-west Mayo by Ó Catháin and O'Flanagan in 1975 is a classic in the genre.[31] There were 802 mostly Irish names in this Irish-speaking district, emblematic of the relationship between community, settlement and place in the past. The survival of these hundreds of minor names in Gaeltacht areas, or areas that were recently Irish-speaking, testifies to the extraordinary richness of this toponymical tradition.

The success of Tim Robinson's pioneering endeavours in the Burren, the Aran Islands and Connemara reflects this popular interest. His Connemara maps record all the townlands and hundreds of minor names within them, together with copious local topographical and

social detail.[32] *Stones of Aran: labyrinth* is a latter-day *Dinnseanchas* of many names on the Aran Islands:

> opposite the old King house … is Gairdín na Saili, the sally garden, a tiny quarter-acre nestled into the curving fall of the road, full of osiers, which used to be regularly coppiced and orderly but now are inextricably rampant. The only basket-maker we knew lived a little way back east, in Baile na Creige: Joeen na gCloch, Joeen of the stones … . Having irrigated the sally-garden, the water trickles through its wall and disappears underground in the next field, Gort an Bhiolair, the garden of the watercress … . South of that field and just outside Gilbert Cottage is Garraí na Ceártan, the field of the smithy … opposite them a sequence of rough meadows collectively known as Gort an Éadáin, the field of the face, referring to the cliff-face of the scarp … . Once, perhaps fifty or sixty years ago, two men were digging shale out from under the scarp here; they broke off to go home for dinner, leaving their baskets in the field, and when they came back there was a white rabbit in each basket, which frightened them so much they abandoned the work and never took it up again.[33]

The island-wide revival of interest in this place-name heritage is receiving significant public support, as local territorial, topographic and toponymic minutiae have become important products of local community and culture. The Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) has commissioned the Department of Celtic in Queen's University, Belfast in the past decade to research all townland names in Northern Ireland.[34] Indeed many local projects with cultural and historical dimensions have been funded by state or by the European Union. Genealogical and place-name projects, for example, include the Cork Place Names Survey, which is funded by Cork County Council, the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, and Foras Áiseanna Saothair, and has recently been extended to Kerry. In north-west Mayo, the local community has surveyed a fifteen-townland area known as Dún Chaochán, with Foras Áiseanna Saothair, and Údarás na Gaeltachta and Heritage Council support.[35]

Apart from other territorial divisions, one of the commonest topographical features in the Irish landscape today are the tens of thousands of small field units into which it has been fragmented for up to and over two hundred years (depending on region). These ubiquitous territorial and tenurial features in the Irish landscape have

been extensively characterised by naming practices and patterns.

Research into the significance of the minor names raises a number of methodological issues. The Irish Folklore Commission undertook a schools survey of folklore throughout Ireland in the late 1930s and its main archive, held at the Department of Irish Folklore, University College, Dublin contains sporadic collections of field-names and other minor names. Local history society journals since the 1940s have also occasionally published random collections of minor names. Unfortunately, until recently most of these efforts have consisted of lists of names disconnected from landscape. Maps have rarely been used to record the names, with the result that their geographical context has been lost. But in the past decade a number of projects have been undertaken that have overcome the deficiencies of past projects and established a successful *modus operandi* for the recording of minor names in Ireland. A national project requires a lot of workers but, as has been demonstrated in a number of instances, much can be undertaken voluntarily at local level, and especially at local school level, replicating the approach undertaken by the Folklore Commission more than sixty years ago.

Case studies in minor place-name heritage

West Mayo

The diversity and significance of this minor place-name heritage is best illustrated by reference to specific case-studies. Knappaghbeg townland,[36] 3 km from Westport, consists of small sandy drumlins with extensive moorland commonage and contains the remains of four rundale farm clusters that were separately identified with their own sub-areas: Creggandarragh, Ballinlough, Corranaldra and Lettereen (Fig. 27.1). These represented the extent of minor names officially recorded by the Ordnance Survey within the townland. There were, however, other 'village' names which were not recorded but which are still remembered locally: Pol na gCon, Áit Uí Mháile and Garananny. Until the 1920s, when the Land Commission reorganised the farms, the lands of the occupiers were intricately interspersed. There are still remnants of scattered ownership today. Loughloon (Fig. 27.2) is a mountainy townland underneath Croagh Patrick which today consists of five farms, but which in 1911 consisted of twenty-five farms. Some of its holdings were reorganised following Land Commission migration to Co. Meath in the 1940s. As Fig. 27.1 shows, in Knappaghbeg more than one hundred names were recorded in part of the townland. In Loughloon, in one small
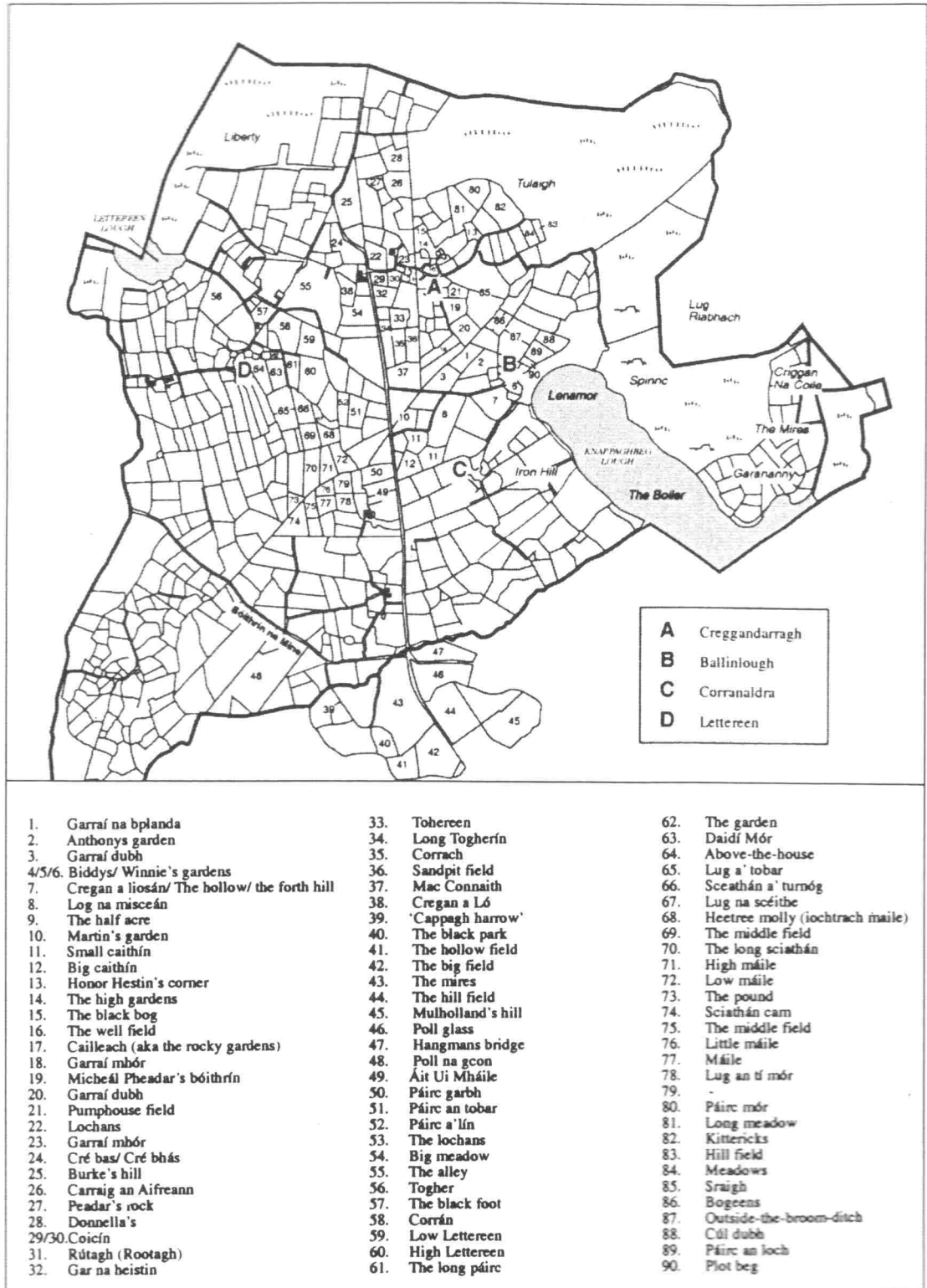
1.	Garraí na bplanda	33.	Tohereen	62.	The garden
2.	Anthonys garden	34.	Long Togherín	63.	Daidí Mór
3.	Garraí dubh	35.	Corrach	64.	Above-the-house
4/5/6.	Biddys/ Winnie's gardens	36.	Sandpit field	65.	Lug a' tobar
7.	Cregan a liosán/ The hollow/ the forth hill	37.	Mac Connaith	66.	Sceathán a' turnóg
8.	Log na misceán	38.	Cregan a Ló	67.	Lug na scéithe
9.	The half acre	39.	'Cappagh harrow'	68.	Heetree molly (iochtrach maile)
10.	Martin's garden	40.	The black park	69.	The middle field
11.	Small caithín	41.	The hollow field	70.	The long sciathán
12.	Big caithín	42.	The big field	71.	High máile
13.	Honor Hestin's corner	43.	The mires	72.	Low máile
14.	The high gardens	44.	The hill field	73.	The pound
15.	The black bog	45.	Mulholland's hill	74.	Sciathán cam
16.	The well field	46.	Poll glass	75.	The middle field
17.	Cailleach (aka the rocky gardens)	47.	Hangmans bridge	76.	Little máile
18.	Garraí mhór	48.	Poll na gcon	77.	Máile
19.	Micheál Pheadar's bóithrín	49.	Áit Ui Mháile	78.	Lug an tí mór
20.	Garraí dubh	50.	Páirc garbh	79.	-
21.	Pumphouse field	51.	Páirc an tobar	80.	Páirc mór
22.	Lochans	52.	Páirc a'lín	81.	Long meadow
23.	Garraí mhór	53.	The lochans	82.	Kittericks
24.	Cré bas/ Cré bhás	54.	Big meadow	83.	Hill field
25.	Burke's hill	55.	The alley	84.	Meadows
26.	Carraig an Aifreann	56.	Togher	85.	Sraigh
27.	Peadar's rock	57.	The black foot	86.	Bogeens
28.	Donnella's	58.	Corrán	87.	Outside-the-broom-ditch
29/30.	Coicín	59.	Low Lettereen	88.	Cúl dubh
31.	Rútagh (Rootagh)	60.	High Lettereen	89.	Páirc an loch
32.	Gar na heistin	61.	The long páirc	90.	Plot beg

Legend:
A — Creggandarragh
B — Ballinlough
C — Corranaldra
D — Lettereen

Fig. 27.1 Townland of Knappaghbeg, Co. Mayo, based on field-work by the author.

twenty-acre mountain farm, forty-seven separate names were identified. Other farms there have reverted to a ferny wilderness — lost fields (and walls and hedges) whose names and memories are forgotten. Forgotten, too, are the minor names in farms that have been sold or exchanged by the Land Commission in the 1930s, 1940s
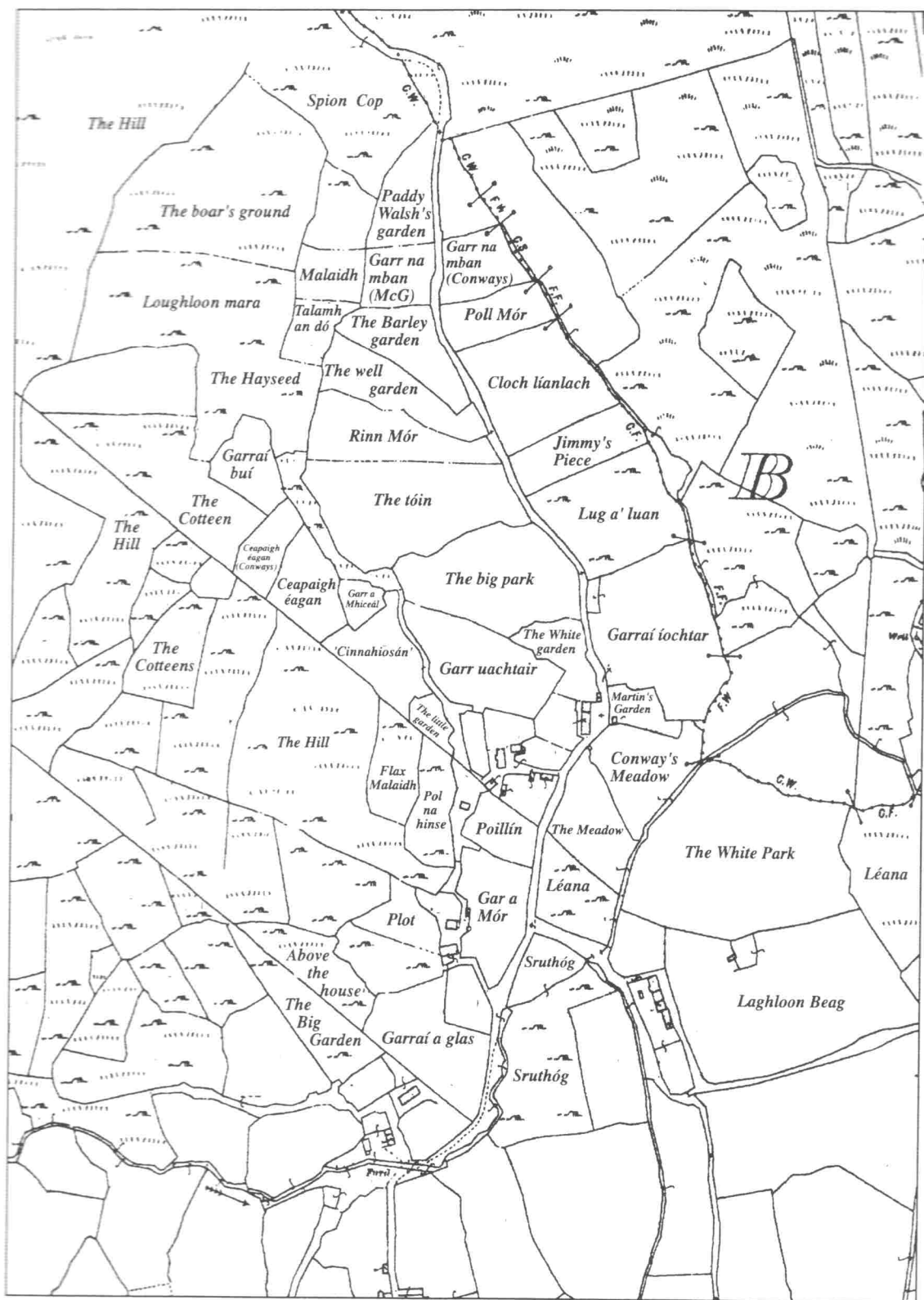
Fig. 27.2 Townland of Loughloon, Co. Mayo, based on
field-work by the author.

and 1950s. Approximately half the names in both places are in Irish,
some mixtures of Irish and English, such as The Long Sciathán or The
Big Páirc, but most were in comparatively undistorted Irish: Lug an Tí
Mór, Páirc an Tobar, Páirc an Aifreann.

North Mayo

Dún Chaochán is located in Belmullet. It consists of fourteen townlands in a Gaeltacht area of marginal land, with some spectacular scenery overlooking the ocean, also exhibiting residues of the rundale system. Members of the local community and local schools collected more than 1,500 names, which have been mapped and published on CD-ROM. Fig. 27.3 shows part of the small townland of Port a' Chlóidh (Portacloy). The names are predominantly
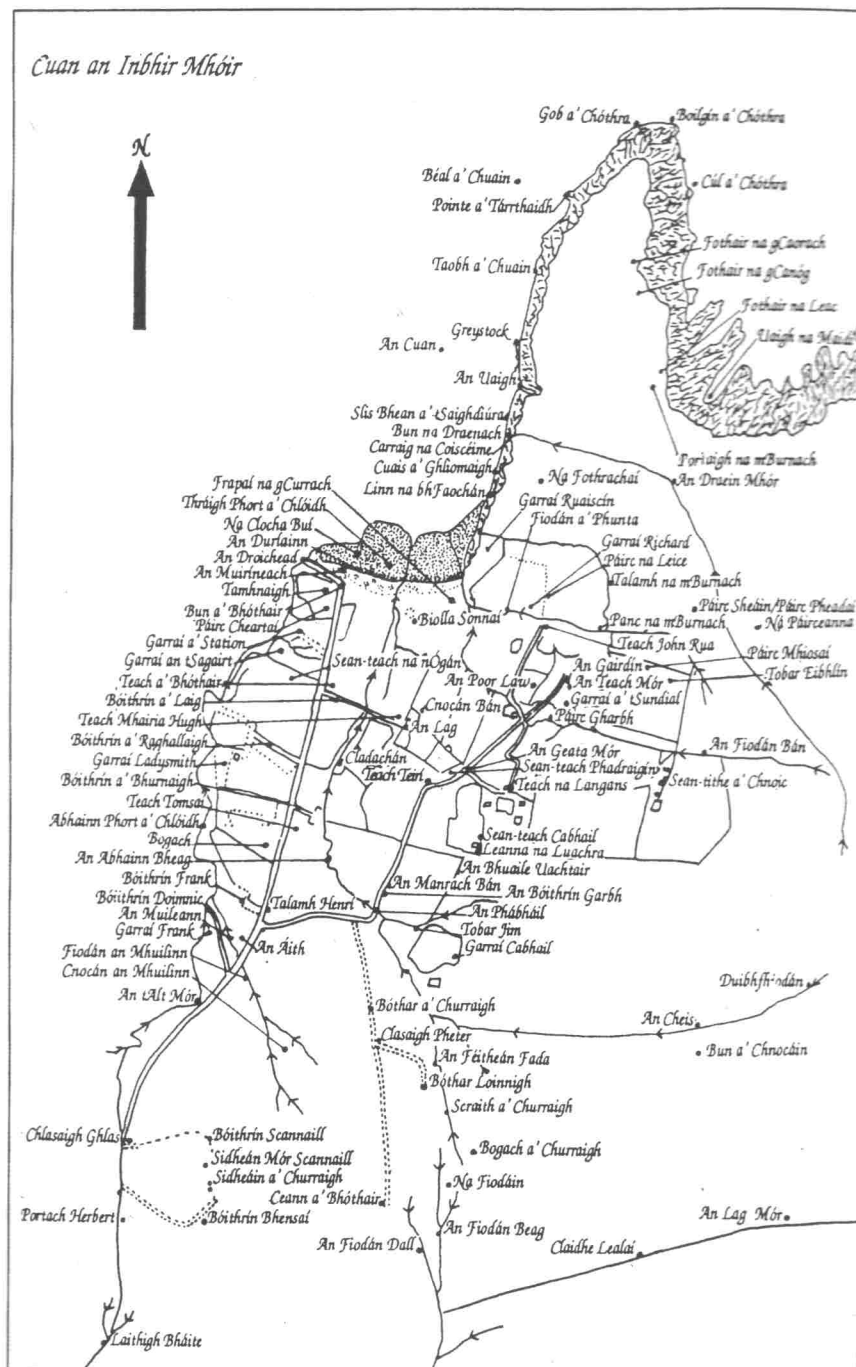
Fig. 27.3 Part of the townland of Port a' Chlóidh (Portacloy), Co. Mayo, based on material supplied by Comhar Dún Chaocháin Teo.

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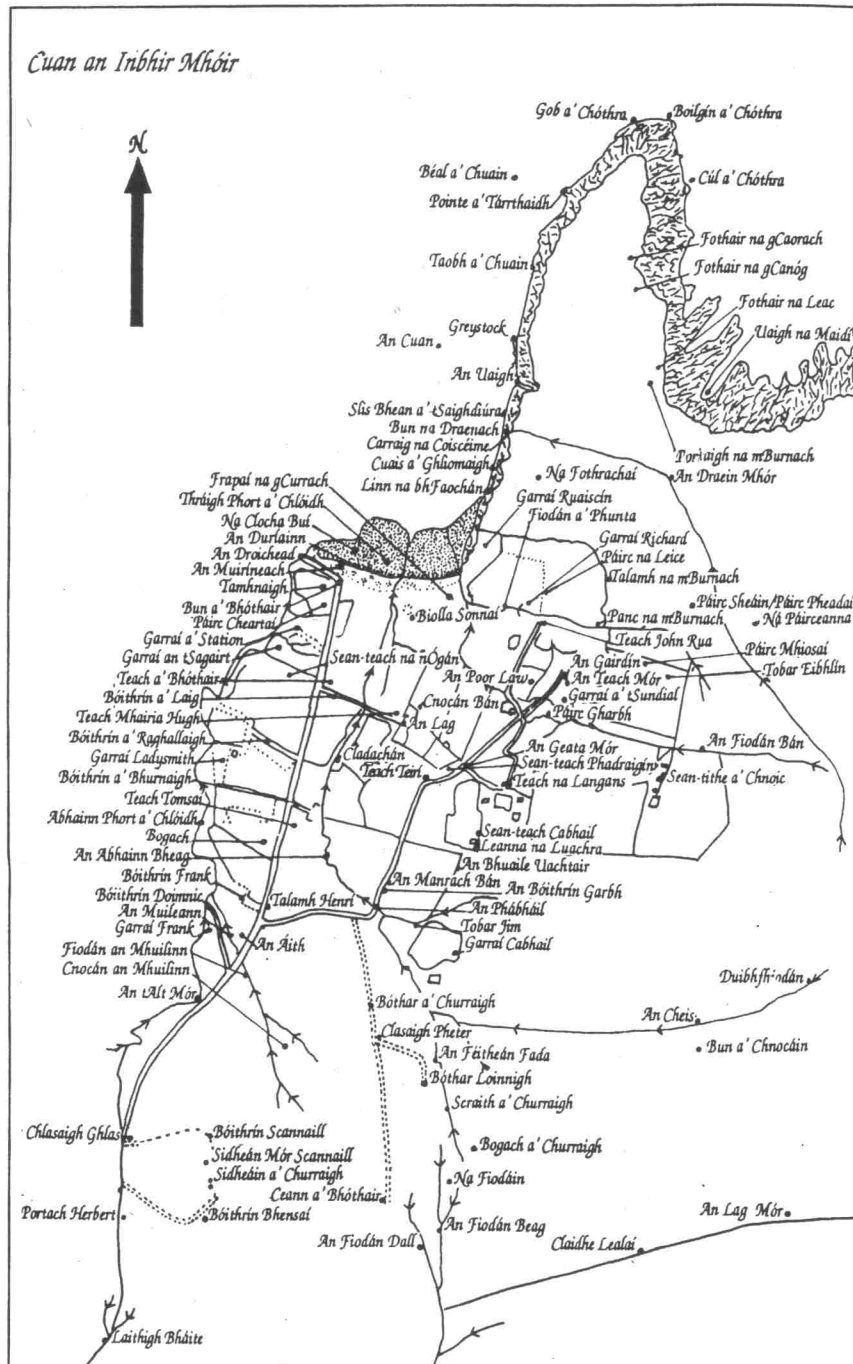

Fig. 27.3 Part of the townland of Port a' Chlóidh (Portacloy), Co. Mayo, based on material supplied by Comhar Dún Chaocháin Teo.

in Irish, with great numbers along the shorelands, a characteristic of most of the islands and coastlands of the west.

Cork and Kerry

The Cork and Kerry place-name survey has been ongoing since 1996 with the objective of preserving the place-name heritage of each of the counties' townlands. It has received widespread co-operation from schoolteachers in more than 290 schools, through whom maps and questionnaires are distributed. Trained surveyors are also engaged in visits to farmers and in library research on the names. To date, this enormous project has recorded more than 50,000 previously unmapped names in a place-name archive in Cork County Library. Fig. 27.4 provides an example of forty-eight names in the townland of Dromonig in the barony of Muskerry in the Cork Gaeltacht. The methodologies employed in the Cork-Kerry project demonstrate an approach that would be appropriate in other regions in Ireland.[37]

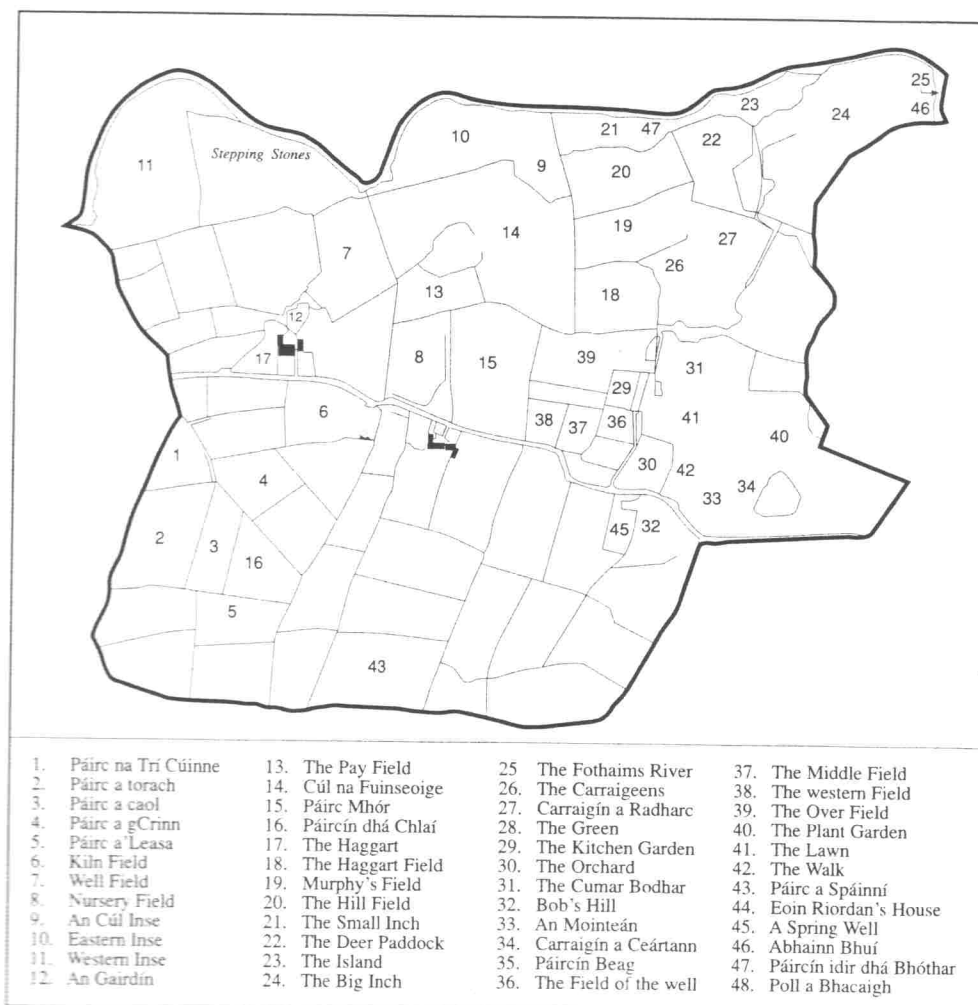| 1.	Páirc na Trí Cúinne	13.	The Pay Field	25	The Fothaims River	37.	The Middle Field
2.	Páirc a torach	14.	Cúl na Fuinseoige	26.	The Carraigeens	38.	The western Field
3.	Páirc a caol	15.	Páirc Mhór	27.	Carraigín a Radharc	39.	The Over Field
4.	Páirc a gCrinn	16.	Páircín dhá Chlaí	28.	The Green	40.	The Plant Garden
5.	Páirc a'Leasa	17.	The Haggart	29.	The Kitchen Garden	41.	The Lawn
6.	Kiln Field	18.	The Haggart Field	30.	The Orchard	42.	The Walk
7.	Well Field	19.	Murphy's Field	31.	The Cumar Bodhar	43.	Páirc a Spáinní
8.	Nursery Field	20.	The Hill Field	32.	Bob's Hill	44.	Eoin Riordan's House
9.	An Cúl Inse	21.	The Small Inch	33.	An Mointeán	45.	A Spring Well
10.	Eastern Inse	22.	The Deer Paddock	34.	Carraigín a Ceártann	46.	Abhainn Bhuí
11.	Western Inse	23.	The Island	35.	Páircín Beag	47.	Páircín idir dhá Bhóthar
12.	An Gairdín	24.	The Big Inch	36.	The Field of the well	48.	Poll a Bhacaigh

Fig. 27.4 Townland of Dromonig, barony of Muskerry, Co. Cork, based on the Cork Place-names Survey.

Though in a Gaeltacht area, a considerable number of the field-names are in English, which presumably reflect the most recent additions, or in some cases, translations from original Irish names. For example, Cúl Inse (referring to a field next to the river) is adjacent to Eastern Inse and The Small Inch.

Down

Down County Museum has been managing a project for a number of years to collect and map minor names in the county with voluntary help. Fig. 27.5 shows the location of forty-six field-names in the townland of Slievenagriddle, located in the barony of Lecale in the south-east of the county. As would be expected, nearly all the names are in English, with a smattering of some Ulster-Scots names: The

1. The Pump Field	16. The Wee Hill	31. The Lousy Corner Field
2. Lagalean	17. The Hollow	32. The Jib
3. Lagalean	18. The Shop Field	33. The Meadow
4. The Griddle Loney Field	19. The T. Parks	34. The Meadow
5. The Standing Stones Field	20. The Pay Park	35. The Meadow
6. The Back Brae	21. Carmel	36. The Second Field
6A. The Lough Head Field	22. No name	37. The Second Field
7. The Back Brae	23. The Wee Pointy Field	38. The First Field
8. No name	24. The Far Town	39. No name
9. No name	25. No name	40. The Common
10. The Mountain	26. The Hill	41. In Front of the Door
11. The Knowe Field	27. The Long Garden	42. behind the Byre
12. The Big Flat Field	28. Kelly's Fields	43. Joe's Field
13. Wallace's Hill	29. The Boal or Bowl field	44. The Hill
14. No name	29A. Stone Park	51. The Round Field
15. Carlin	30. The Quarry Field	55. The Stripe

Fig. 27.5 Townland of Slievenagriddle, barony of Lecale, Co. Down, based on material in Downpatrick Museum.

Back Brae, The Loney Field. Similarly, in south Co. Wexford, which also has a rich legacy of field-names, investigations show that all are in English, with a minority of Yola names (a dialect descending from the Norman settlement) persisting.

Meath

Fig. 27.6 shows minor names in two townlands near Duleek, predominantly names of large rectangular fields in a rich agricultural landscape.[38] In this part of Co. Meath, as can be seen, the names are predominantly in English. Further north in the county around Oldcastle and Kells, more Irish names commonly appear.
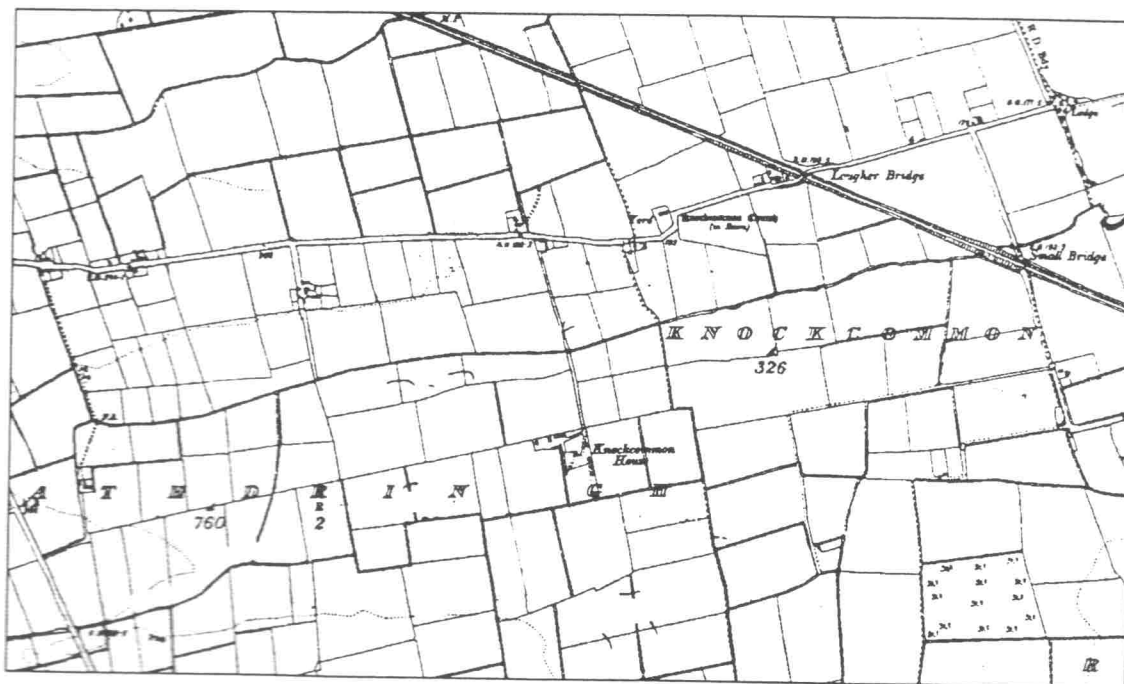
Fig. 27.6 Townlands near Duleek, Co. Meath, based on Duffy, 'Heritage and history'.

Minor place-names and local identity

The large-scale Ordnance Survey maps of all these townlands show an intricate lattice of fields and moorland, in mountain, valley, rich and poor land, roads and lane networks, but otherwise deceptively empty spaces with no record of the underlying wealth of names associated with the local landscape. These names refer mainly to fields, but also to other features and local landmarks — boreens (*bóithrín*, 'little road' or 'lane'), ditches, and sub-districts. Older people in the localities, particularly men, are best able to recall the names. In west Mayo, recollection of field-names was difficult because the original fields had often been amalgamated, with the result that it has been possible to recover only about half the names that have

survived modification of field structures. Most respondents usually remember only the minor names of their own or neighbouring farms. Where farms have been sold or families moved through Land Commission migrations or exchanges, name continuity is lost.

In the context of the sweeping changes taking place in the landscape (and the potential for even greater changes in the future), minor names represent an important aspect of local sense of place and identity. Their very presence in such great numbers is a measure of their impact. They are markers of vernacular differences in places that can contribute enormously to understanding the texture of the local cultural landscape. Linguistic indicators are important in understanding Irish cultural landscape evolution. The survival of Irish (Gaelic) name forms in different regions has long been significant in this context and townland names have been comprehensively studied by scholars. The study of minor names, however, represents a recent and growing interest. Outside the Gaeltacht areas, approximately half the minor names in west Mayo are in Irish (Gaelic) and the remainder in English, undoubtedly reflecting a transitional period over the past couple of centuries when English was in the ascendant locally. As one would expect, the greatest number of Irish names has survived in the west of Ireland where the language has persisted longest. But even in extensive regions where Irish has long gone, Irish name forms have endured in local memory.

The field-names reflect in their meanings essential functional qualities, ranging through basic descriptions of size, shape, quality of land or situation of the field. The Long Field, The Wee Pointy Field (in Co. Down), The Three Corners (which occurs universally) are common descriptions of shape. In Dromonig in Cork, Páircín Dhá Chlaí refers to a three-cornered or triangular field. In Monaghan, Mayo and many other places, such triangular fields were frequently called The Smoothing Iron. On the far western shores of Mayo, Viney notes fields with names such as the following: Ruadh-muinig na Scamall (field like a rough red mane in which the sailing clouds are mirrored?), Gan Famainn ('without herbage') and Gan Móin ('without turf').[39] In earlier days of long hours and manual labour in fields, farmers were keenly aware of the geometrical characteristics of their fields. Similarly they were well acquainted with their soil and land-use qualities: one stoney field in Clontibret parish in Monaghan in the 1930s was called The Purgatory Field. The Mires and The Bottoms (field near a stream) in Knappaghbeg refer to distinctive characteristics, as well as The Hayseed or Poll na Hinse in Loughloon or field-names with a *malaidh* reference, meaning 'a hollow'. Common local features or landmarks were also used as reference

points, such as Páirc an Tobar or The Well Field, The Pump Field, The Standing Stones Field, The Quarry Field, The Church Field, The Railway Field. Names may have been simply descriptive of location as in Above-the-House, In-Front-of-the-Door, Behind-the-Byre, íochtar/uachtar or 'upper/lower', The Low Field, The Bottoms, or most basic of all and clearly unique to one farm, The First Field or The Second Field (in Slievenagriddle). One of the commonest naming practices all over the country, which would normally follow the sale or consolidation sales of land holdings, uses the names of previous owners, either personal (as in Winnie's Garden or Micheál Pheadar's Bóithrín in Knappaghbeg) or surnames, as in Burke's Hill or Kelly's Field. Finally, in a minority of cases, names might be represented as commemorating a notable local or national event, such as a shipwreck along the coast, or in the case of The Spying Cop (*recte* Spion Kop) in Loughloon referring to a battle in the Boer War; Garraí Ladysmith in Port a' Chlóidh refers to the same period. Bóithrín na Mine in Knappaghbeg may refer to a famine relief road, while The Hangman's Bridge in Knappaghbeg also has some forgotten local significance.

Most of the minor names in these case-studies are simple, homely descriptive names, as one would expect in a simple (in the sense of an unlettered) farming community. In the context of meanings, there has existed in the past a certain élitism amongst Irish scholars in their readings of what is significant and what is not in terms of place-names. This has found expression especially in ignoring English names entirely and in recording only those which acquired some exoticism by being in Irish, though Eoin Mac Neill when collecting names in Clare Island in 1913 ignored most of the field and garden names because they were too ordinary.[40] In fact, the venerated townland names in Ireland, about which so much is written, are often fairly prosaic when translated into English! Tullynakseagh, Lisnagore, Knappaghbeg are euphonious but simple descriptions of landscapes that were bushy, provided shelter for goats or were hilly, as the case may be. The townland of Aghagower, near Westport, appears as Achadh-ghabhair meaning 'goat's field' in MacFirbisigh's medieval list of Uí Fiachrach names, but in the much earlier Lives of St Patrick it was called Achadh-fobhair, which means the 'spring-well field',[41] a designation that occurs frequently among modern fields.

It is likely that most of the minor field-names are not so old, unlike the townlands whose names were recorded as entities of legal ownership from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Minor names evolved slowly up to the twentieth century. Many of the rundale settlements in the peripheral lands of west Mayo had developed only since the early nineteenth century. Some families

were placed in the Westport area following ejection from south Ulster after the establishment of the Orange Order in 1790s. Dornan points out that minor names on the Inishkea Islands, off Belmullet in Mayo, ignored a fairly rich early Christian landscape legacy in favour of names 'relevant to the [inhabitants'] everyday lives and events remembered'.[42] But Irish and English names reflect one possibly significant variation in terms of origin. Irish names must have originated at a time when the language was still vibrant among the farm families, from at least a century ago. The English names, on the other hand, would have come later when English was becoming commoner in everyday speech.[43] More extensive studies in a county such as Meath might throw light on the experience of the Irish language locally. Some field-names can be precisely dated: The Spion Kop obviously commemorates the Boer War battle in 1900 in which the Connaught Rangers were slaughtered. Others, such as Pol a Bhacaigh in Dromonig, meaning the 'bleaching pool', refers back to an earlier period in the rural economy. Some rare cases, such as The Pumphouse Field, may have originated within the last fifty years. In terms of approximate dating also, the names of families attached to fields (mainly previous owners) can frequently be informative. Kitterick's in Knappaghbeg, for example, can be successfully traced to a family that predated Griffith's valuation in 1855.

In terms of regional significance, one might suggest that field-names and other minor names seem to have had a richer texture in regions of high rural population density, small farms and mixed agricultural traditions. Field, farm and population indexes are very different between east and west. There is greater detail in the texture of landscape in the west and other more intensively occupied places. Even thinly populated western wastes were used for turbary and grazing, and coastal and island communities also used shorelands fairly intensively, so that there are lots of names reflecting such diverse land-uses.[44] In Loughloon, in west Mayo, there was a large population one hundred years ago, with dozens of farm families in close relation with the landscape, a time when walking facilitated intimate knowledge and naming of local farmscapes. One informant described the place when he was growing up (in the second decade of the twentieth century) as being 'black with spuds, with men and boys with spades cultivating the ridges, talking across the stone walls'. His words immediately lent sense to the names given to the landscape. Areas of topographical diversity, such as the lakelands, bogs and marginal lands of the west, as well as its complex coast, also appear to exhibit a greater diversity of minor names, in addition to field-names. Many of these regions contain isolated communities

where there has been a slower rate of change and less loss of minor place-name heritage. In the emptier, more commercial grasslands of south Meath, in contrast, where cattle grazed in large fields, there seems to have been a poorer tradition of field-naming.

Field-names and other minor names, therefore, can be seen as representing a key to reading and understanding a very local world that, like the houses and yards, is part of a sort of private/familial space into which people are born but which is usually inaccessible to outsiders. In terms of Heaney's earlier assessment of place and landscape, they are part of the familiar furniture of the landscape known only to the occupants or locals, in many ways like the familiar arrangement of furniture in our houses and apartments. These naming patterns reflected the centrality of field and farm in the daily lives of the people at one time. In Mayo especially, where farms were tiny and there were lots of people, it was a form of grid-referencing that helped each person to locate themselves in their home place. If a mother was looking for the whereabouts of one of her children, or the location of a calf, or where the men were working, they could be located precisely by field.

The parish is the community's space, and the outsider can know it easily. It is a public enough world — it may be signposted for instance. So also with the townland, which is identifiable to outsiders, used as postal address and identified on maps. But spending time in a place with its inhabitants, one can see that what looks like a repetitive pattern of fields has shape, aspect, size and other geometrical and geographical qualities that take on individuality as their names are recited. The local man is in his own local world at the base of a hierarchy of places where the fields as well as rocks, roads, hills, and myriad tiny spaces have been christened with homely and sometimes inexplicable names that make sense to him, or at least made sense to his parents' and grandparents' generation. 'All these identical fields of shaggy grass and herbs struggling up through shattered rock are fiercely individualistic too, if one makes the mistake of paying attention to them', Robinson says of the landscape of Na Craga in Aran. 'Thousands of names must have been given to them over the centuries, most of them forgotten ...'.[45]

The field-names are ultimately, therefore, an important part of the micro-geography of local landscape and place. Ordered, seen and read at this level, they are part of a vocabulary of fields *vis-à-vis* farm, farmyard and house. The landscape's elements are identified by relationship to each house or farm (as in The Far Field, The Top Field, The Bottoms. Upper-, Lower-, Iochtar, Uachtar), by its local soil or land-use qualities for the farm (The Furry Field, Well Field, Brick

Field, The Black Bog, The Bull Field), or by some local farm characteristic such as shape or size (The Three-cornered Field, The Sixteen Acres, The Big Flat Field, The Round Field). Patrick Kavanagh — as good a witness on fields as most — claimed that it took a lifetime to know a field,[46] which may seem a little overstated, but has a ring of truth. Farmers knew their fields and their local place in winter and summer, in sunshine and shadow, day and night, wet and dry, under grass or under crop, ploughing and sowing and reaping. In earlier, more labour-intensive times they would have spent many hours with spade or scythe, or following the horse round and round this local space. The naming pattern reflects this intimate knowledge. If the population and rural economy had continued unchanged through the twentieth century, it is likely that many names might have been replaced, evolving to reflect changing circumstances in local life, economy and landscape. What happened instead was that, as a result of socio-economic changes in the countryside — including out-migration and the implementation of productivist strategies in agriculture from the 1960s — the practice of naming at this intricate scale virtually ceased for much of the twentieth century. We are left today with an attenuated legacy of older names.

Conclusion

Cherishing local cultural distinctiveness is a valid political objective today and, thanks to tourism, it has viable economic potential. One of the principal reasons for the recent growth in interest in local studies is probably the extent and speed of change in the past generation, which has obliterated or vastly simplified the complex geographies and histories of local places. The hierarchy of localities, or pyramid of places where 'the local' was dominant — from house to yard, to field, farm, village, townland, to parish and beyond — has been inverted, with 'networking' at international rather than at local levels. The minute naming of places and farmscapes radiating out from the farmhouse is a reflection of the more crowded and local worlds of the recent past and is a legacy of generations who manhandled the landscapes of their home places. Most of these intimate minor names are being forgotten in emptier and tractored landscapes. The farm community today probably has little use for such local detail. The purpose of this paper has been to resurrect these lost landscapes as an important chapter in the evolution of many rural places. They represent part of a vernacular landscape, a hugely detailed local heritage that is becoming an important link in many communities' knowledge of their pasts and presents. At a time when conservation of the material fabric of the rural landscape is a growing priority and

is supported by European Union-inspired schemes such the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme, it might be opportune to consider conservation of more intangible elements of the cultural landscape such as place-names.

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank James Keenan, cartographer in the Geography Department, for preparing the maps in this chapter.

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36. Field-work in Knappaghbeg and Loughloon was undertaken by the author.

37. The Cork project is directed by Dr Eamon Lankford, author of *Cape Clear Island, its people and landscape* (Cape Clear, 1999), which contains a sample of 136 minor names.

38. I am indebted to Enda O'Boyle, who supervised this survey by his pupils in Knockcommon school twenty years ago. See P. J. Duffy, 'Heritage and history: exploring landscapes and place in County Meath' in *Ríocht na Midhe*, xi (2000), pp 187–218.

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