Perspectives on the Making of the Cavan Landscape

P . J . D U F F Y

'The Irish landscape is a tangled series of inscriptions, signs and symbols which reflect the complicated prehistory and history of settlement and culture in this relatively small but diverse island'.

W. J. Smyth[1]

The aim of this essay is to provide a geographical overview of the Cavan region refracted, as it were, through the lenses of a variety of sources. In this way we can throw light on some of the problems in studying the evolution of the Cavan landscape. The concept of landscape evolution forms a convenient frame of reference. 'Landscape' can be defined as the territorial expression of the imprint of society in material and non-material forms through past time. The 'making' of that landscape, a term used especially by geographers, emphasises the centrality of society's role in the emerging morphology of the landscape.

To most Irish people, Cavan conveys images of a borderland lying to the north of the midlands and forming part of south Ulster—a hilly region of drumlins, abundant surface water, small farms and farmhouses girdling the hillsides with a tangle of by-roads connecting distinctively-named towns and villages. Its geographical location is clearly one of its most important defining characteristics. The provincial, diocesan and county boundaries which delimit this region, for instance, are of great endurance and antiquity, reflecting a borderland and frontier region for many centuries. Ultimately, any understanding of the modern landscape assumes some knowledge of its historical evolution, and in the Cavan region, its past experiences have been influenced in no small measure by its location in the broad belt of drumlins bordering the south of Ulster.

It has been said of England, and it is equally true of Ireland, that 'there are few blanks on the map ... almost everywhere is a place with a meaning and a character of its own'.[2] Places evolve over time; they are the stages on which our predecessors, the people who have passed through these places, played out their parts, modifying, moulding, building and shaping the landscape, putting their stamp on it so that each place represents each generation's contribution to its making. The apparent randomness of much of the visible

landscape reflects these incremental contributions to the organisation of that landscape at different times in the past. What is sometimes called the 'humanised' landscape, therefore, is the end result of our ancestors' efforts at organising their lives, economies, communities and landscapes according to the circumstances and conditions of their times. Until the mass-production of concrete blocks, garden nurseries and universal tastes in everything from house to hedge design, 'local-ness' prevailed, and local places retained their vernacular characters in plants, crops, houses, dress, language, song and customs.

Seamus Heaney, in writing about our consciousness of the past, has eloquently illustrated the primacy of landscape and place in human understanding. He has spoken of how inherited objects transmit the climate of a lost world which should not be undervalued: '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] Our landscape, especially our childhood landscape—our first place—must have such a significance. It is our contact with our pasts and the people who have occupied and put their mark on this space before our time: they have touched the stones, the fields, the hedges, the furniture of the landscape. And because of this we value it.

Apart from this instinctive feeling about the depth of meaning in landscape, today's world has led to a new awareness of the value of the inherited artifacts and landscapes which surround us. The tourism industry has invested many of our countrysides and towns with opportunities which were not available to our ancestors in these places. The postmodern world has afforded many people from near and far the leisure to contemplate the landscape. This 'tourist gaze' has encouraged us to dissagregate the landscape into its component parts, for better presentation and marketing perhaps, but also for better understanding and appreciation generally.[4]

The principal ingredients of any Irish landscape may be broadly categorised into three elements, hinted at in Estyn Evans' trinity of habitat, heritage and history. There are the topographical features of, for instance, mountains, valleys, bogs, lakes and streams, the ecological elements of plant cover, trees and heath and the human impact of settlement—the built environment and cultural iconographies of placenames, religion and tradition. The cultural impact is the consequence of processes acting slowly on the landscape over long periods of time resulting, for example, in English landscapes so 'tamed, trimmed and humanised as to give the impression of a vast ornamental farm', or American landscapes 'of uncontrollable chaos inhabited by happy accidents'.[5] In Ireland one can reasonably see the intimate reflections of the cultural diversity of four hundred years in the contrast between the sabbath
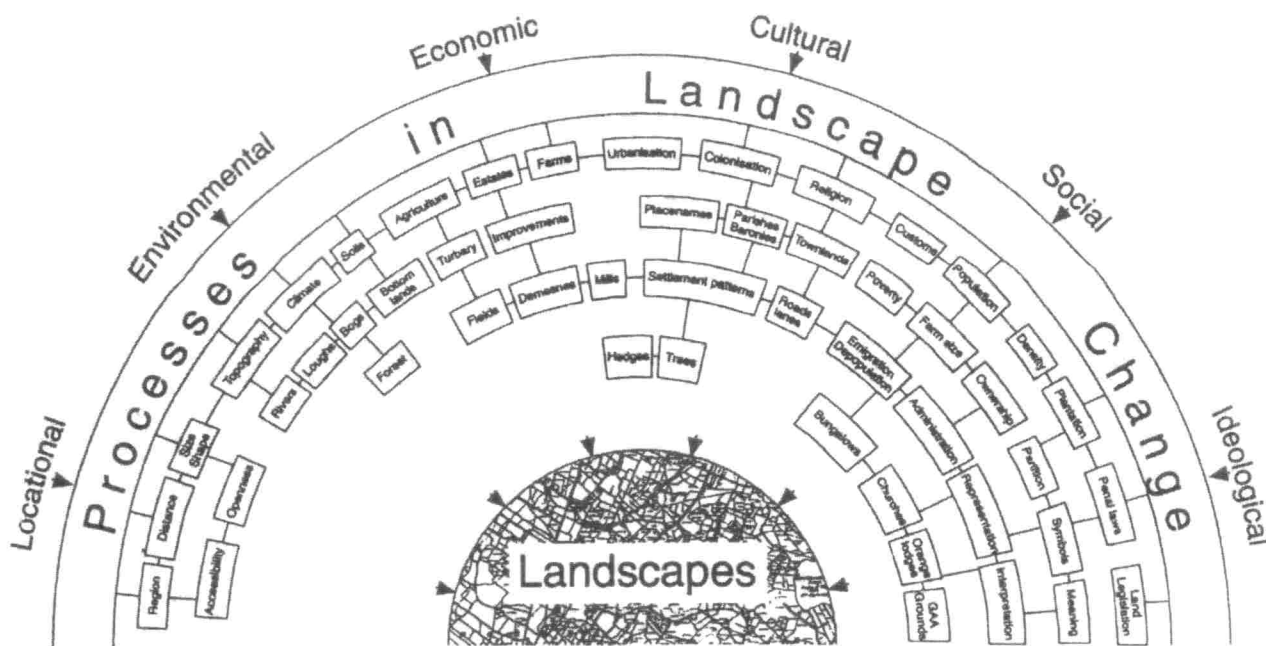
Figure 1   Processes in Landscape Change

staidness, punk hedgestyles and tidy farmscapes of north Down and the dishevilled and untidy landscapes of south Ulster.

This landscape perspective can be conveniently illustrated in a diagram (figure 1) which shows the interaction of the processes of change. These express themselves territorially in the shape and spatial patterning of the landscape. Thus, for example, underdeveloped and marginal regions, urban industrial districts, the location and morphology of settlement as well as other manifestations of territorial organisation are all the consequences of historical processes operating over generations. These proceses can be grouped into those which are the consequences of locational, environmental, economic, cultural, social, political and other factors. The territorial expression of these processes in varying ways and in different circumstances has resulted in the landscape order which we have inherited today.

The simplicity of such a classification must be qualified by taking account of the way in which human behaviour—in the past just as today—in its relations with the landscape, results from variations and changes in ideology, attitudes and prejudices. Economic, social or political responses by society to change, for instance, are often based on partial or biassed information. Again perceptions or interpretations of these processes in the past, or their landscape expressions today, can frequently vary from person to person, community to community: there are almost as few 'irrefutable facts' relating to the land-scape's history as relate to its community's past. The 'storied' landscapes of Henry Glassie's Ballymenone, Seamus Heaney's Bann valley, or W.B. Yeats' Sligo, are cases in point.[6] 'Places are made by narrative accretion, they are communicated to us in stories'.[7] This chapter is designed to illustrate in a

general way how the Cavan landscape has been the consequence of the impact and interaction of these processes of change in the past.

I

As suggested above, and as reinforced in Ciaran Parker's essay below, understanding Cavan's past necessitates consideration of the significance of its regional location. Much of the behaviour of the lowly or lordly occupiers of east Breifne or Cavan over the past millennium, as they developed and 'organised' their landscape, was influenced by the relationship of the area to areas and communities around it.

In the late medieval and early modern period, east Breifne was one of a belt of small, minor lordships running across the southern extremity of Ulster, bordering on the northern and north western edge of the Pale. Indeed until the fourteenth century, Breifne was a kingdom or territory which had strong political associations with the O'Rourkes and Connacht. In the sixteenth century the O'Reillys, like the Mac Mahons of Airghialla and Maguires of Fermanagh, were wedged between the Gaelic strongholds to the north in Ulster and the strenghtening English bridgehead to the south in the Pale. Lord Deputy Sussex in 1562, while acknowledging that Breifne was considered part of Connacht, assigned it to Ulster for strategic reasons because 'it bordereth upon the English Pale'. To late sixteenth century Tudor strategists, the earl of Tyrone 'was held to be the chief hinge on which the doors of peace or trouble did hang in those parts'[8] and O'Reilly's Cavan was vulnerably positioned on the threshold.

Loyalty to the crown among the south Ulster lordships correlated closely with proximity to Dublin and on this basis, the O'Reillys were among the most consistenty loyal for much of the sixteenth century.[9] Punitive expeditions could be mounted into the Breifne fairly rapidly: 'six rebels' heads were brought to Dublin by one Mr Plunkett, who took them in the rescue of a prey upon the borders of Louth, being some of the O'Reillys'.[10] Indeed the southern districts of Breifne which were closest to the Pale had for long come under the influence of its community. By the late sixteenth century, they contained a fair sprinkling of Palesmen such as Plunketts, Flemings and Nugents, among their landowners.[11] In addition to political and military acumen, the O'Reillys also practised astute marriage alliances which mirrored their borderland role—at various times in the sixteenth century marrying into Old English families from Meath, or Gaelic O'Donnells, O'Connors or O'Farrells. However, O'Reilly also fell within the orbit of the O'Neills of Tyrone and, in consequence of the earl's political dominance, became engulfed in the nine years war. As a result, and in spite of many years allegiance to the crown, the lands of Cavan were ultimately included in the Ulster

plantation scheme with all that this implied for the subsequent development of the region and its landscapes of country and town.

Inclusion in the Ulster plantation was undoubtedly significant in the shaping of the Cavan landscape but, like south Armagh for example, its experience continued to a great extent to reflect its marginal location—on the southern borders of Ulster and on the edge of the plantation scheme. The cultural and economic impacts on the landscape reflected this marginality. The settler community, for instance, tended to be patchier and more exposed than its counterpart in the north and east of the province. The shape and extent of Cavan, elongated along the southern margins of Ulster, was also important. In many ways, the location of districts within the modern county *vis-á-vis* Ulster, on the one hand, and the midlands on the other, is relevant to the experience of the landscape. For example, the mountainous north-west was remote and poor. The central lakeland of Loughtee had close associations with Fermanagh, facilitated by the easier mode of water transportation. This influenced the initial development and experience of the plantation settlement in these districts in the early seventeenth century. By the 1620s, many poor and remote districts in Cavan had been abandoned by their settlers, like those who had fled from Clankee 'to Clandeboys from whence they came'.[12] The estate of Tonagh, south of the 'Denn mountains' also failed to attract settlers.[13]

II

The environmental legacy of Cavan with its myriad hills and its impeded drainage and lakelands had an important influence on the shaping of the landscape by its occupiers. While, by the Soil Survey's definitions of the late twentieth century, it contains relatively little marginal land, its drumlin gley soils need considerable management to make them efficient. In the midlands to the south, by contrast, both grass and cows grow more easily. In south Ulster, the poorly-drained gleys are plastered in the form of drumlins around substructures of hummocky shale, resulting in the wet landscape of Patrick Kavanagh's stoney grey soil. Until the seventeenth century, the Breifne together with Airghialla and the Fews of Armagh represented a region which was difficult of access, and almost as great a barrier as any mountain range. Indeed the high hills of Cavan and Monaghan have not infrequently been characterised as mountains in the past; the hills of east Cavan, for example, are clearly represented as 'mountains' in the Down Survey maps of 1657 (figure 2). Bishop William Bedell, who was appointed to the diocese of Kilmore in 1629, was reported to have his house 'situate in the county of Cavan in the province of Ulster in Ireland, in a country consisting altogether of hills very steep and high, the valleys between being most commonly boggs and loughs ...'.[14] The political boundaries of the Gaelic territories of south Ulster with
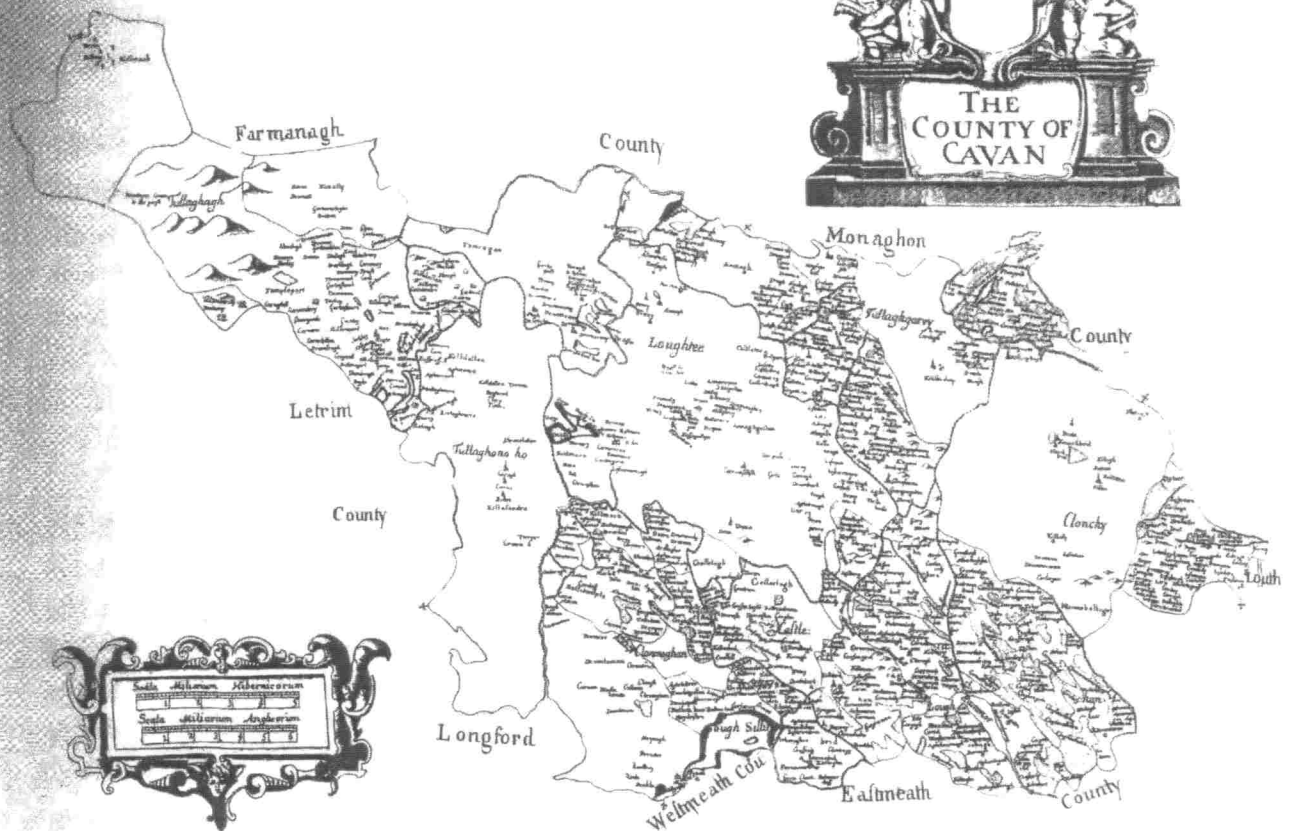
Figure 2   Cavan from Petty's *Hiberniae Delineatio* (1685), based on his Down
            Survey 1657.

the midland region of Ireland coincided remarkably with serried ranks of
drumlins, separated by scrubland and wet bottom lands, which made move-
ment, especially by military groups, particularly fraught. This was a country
of 'rheums, fluxes and distempers' for which uisce beatha and sweat houses
were the traditional remedies. Through the middle ages, the borders of Breifne
were marked by castles, such as Ballaghanea, Mullagh, Muff and Finnea,
guarding the few passes into the region. This south Ulster region presented a
challenge not only to the Dublin government but also to its local lords at-
tempting to consolidate their poorly-endowed territories. There, as Bernadette
Cunningham's essay shows, insubordinate minor branches of the ruling fam-
ily, sheltered by the region's internal fragmentation into hills and sodden
lowlands, frequently threatened the internal peace of the lordship.

The geographical distribution of environmental resources had important
implications for the eventual working out of economic and cultural patterns
on the landscape. There are difficulties in assessing environmental conditions
in the early modern period because generations of husbandry and improve-
ments have made the use of more recent sources somewhat questionable.
Philip Robinson, however, has made a sustainable case for regarding townland
size as a proxy for land quality in the sixteenth century.[15] Evidence from
Monaghan and Fermanagh would certainly suggest that under the Gaelic
system of land assessment, agricultural land units—such as tates or polls-

were smaller in the better lands. In Cavan, the areas in the lucht tigh lands (Loughtee), held by the main branch of the O'Reillys, around Cavan town had the greatest density of townlands (see p. 29 below).

Although the tenement valuation of Ireland by Sir Richard Griffith was only undertaken in the post-Famine period, and so reflects the consequences of agricultural improvements since the seventeenth century, it helps to highlight the range of land quality within the county (figure 3). The lucht tigh lands of the O'Reillys around the lakes in north central Cavan were strategically located at the centre of the Gaelic lordship and contained some of the best land in the area. As in many other planted areas, the lucht tigh lands were especially selected for the favoured and important undertakers in the Ulster plantation. Successful settlement by these undertakers had significant positive repercussions for this landscape in the following centuries, in terms of both farm management and landscape design. By the mid nineteenth century, for instance, a large proportion of the most highly valued houses in the county had been built in this region which also had a significant number of resident landowners. In contrast, lack of seventeenth-century settlement in the least valuable land lying in the mountainy panhandle to the west of the county had negative repercussions in terms of farm size and later landscape development. Thus the uplands in the eastern part of the county between Bailieborough and Monaghan were described by the travelling artist Gabriel
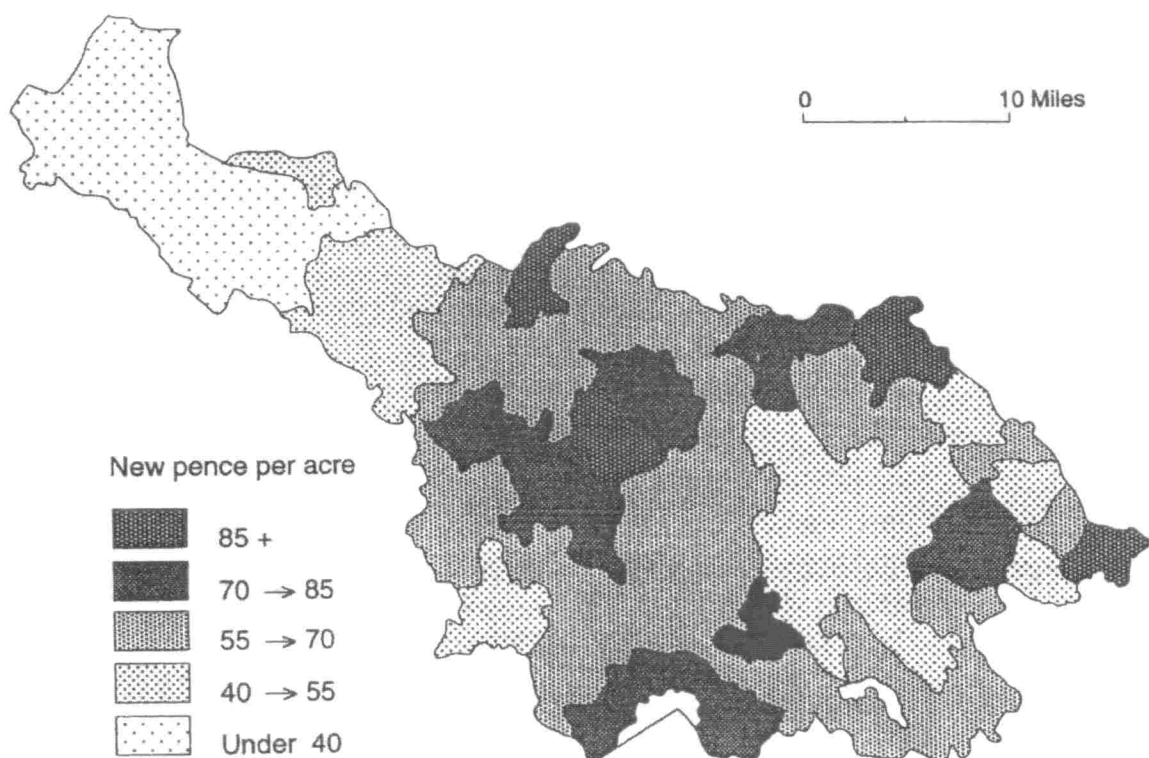

Figure 3   Land Quality: Griffith's Valuation of Cavan

Berenger in 1779 as looking 'poor, the land coarse, the cabins as if going to
ruin, half-thatched, several bogs close to the road ...'.[16]

The environmental legacy has been subjected to considerable changes and
modification, particularly as a result of agricultural improvement from the
seventeenth century. Most importantly this was represented by such develop-
ments as drainage of the bottomlands. Thomas Raven's 1634 survey of Farney
in south Monaghan, for example, showed a number of 'wet' boundaries,
which subsequently became firmed up as the wetlands and marshy interven-
ing lands were drained and reclaimed.[17] As late as the 1830s, the Ordnance
Survey could refer to the effects of drainage and flood control on lowering
water levels in lakes. On a larger scale, one can distinguish between the differ-
ing types and scale of agricultural improvements in varying regions across the
county, positively around the Mullagh and Cootehill areas and more nega-
tively in the uplands to the west. These obviously interrelate with the social
and cultural processes resulting from plantations and settler in-migrations
during the seventeenth century. The lists of grand jury presentments throughout
the eighteenth century contain copious detail on the small incremental im-
provements made to the environmental legacy. Apart from drainage, there
was the continuous improvement of the road network—straightenings, fill-
ings-in, bridge-building, culverts, piecemeal modifications which have led to
the rich, if scarred, heritage of roads in the county today.

There was a piecemeal, day-by-day, year-by-year, decade-by-decade modi-
fication of the physical endowment—drains and ditches, enclosures and hedges,
reclamation and abandonment, cabins and housing—as the fabric of settle-
ment wove its mesh across the skeleton of hills and valleys. Much of this
settlement pattern was born out of social and cultural distinctions in the rural
and urban population, whether of class (landowner, big farm, cottier, long
lease, tenant-at-will), ethnicity or religion.

III

The processes of economic change clearly connect with social and cultural
dimensions of land and its ownership. Estates, big and small, for example,
fragmented, extensive, resident or non-resident all had varying impacts on the
evolution of the landscape. In terms of understanding the modern landscape
undoubtedly the establishment of a framework of landed estates as part of the
Ulster plantation is a significant milestone. Within this frame, the broad
canvas of landscape changes was mediated through the agency of leases and
other mechanisms of the estate system. It seems logical, and most nationalist
historiography has confirmed, that for the settlement plans to work in a
colonial situation the best land should go to the planter. Robinson, however,
suggests that in the case of the Ulster settlement this was not always the
case,[18] due largely to the inadequacies of the plantation's preparatory surveys

and maps which provided unreliable indications of the value of lands. However, good land could be assessed by observation and Sir John Davies was well aware that Cavan's Loughtee barony was 'the best in the county' and should be reserved for the crown. As it turned out, it was allocated to English undertakers, regarded by the government as being critical to the success of the settlement because of their perceived superior capital assets.

Figure 4 shows the allocation of lands in Cavan under the Ulster plantation scheme. The principal consequence of the implementation of the scheme was the granting of consolidated blocks of land to undertakers. Apart from the allocation of the O'Reilly lucht tigh lands to English undertakers, the baronies of Clankee and Tullyhunco were designated for Scottish undertakers. Lands for the native Irish and the ex-soldiers and government officials (grouped together as servitors) were allotted in a broad arc extending southwards from the modern Cootehill area and westwards to the Longford border. Apart from the proportion granted to the head of the O'Reilly family, Mulmory, most of the native Irish freeholders were small grantees of one or two polls. The impression created by the geography of the distribution is that they were given whatever lands remained after the servitors had been satisfied in Clanmahon, Castlerahan and Tullygarvey baronies. Many of the servitors in Cavan were Palesmen such as Sir Thomas Ashe, Sir John Elliot and Sir James Dillon, part of a long-established tradition of holding land in the Breifne,
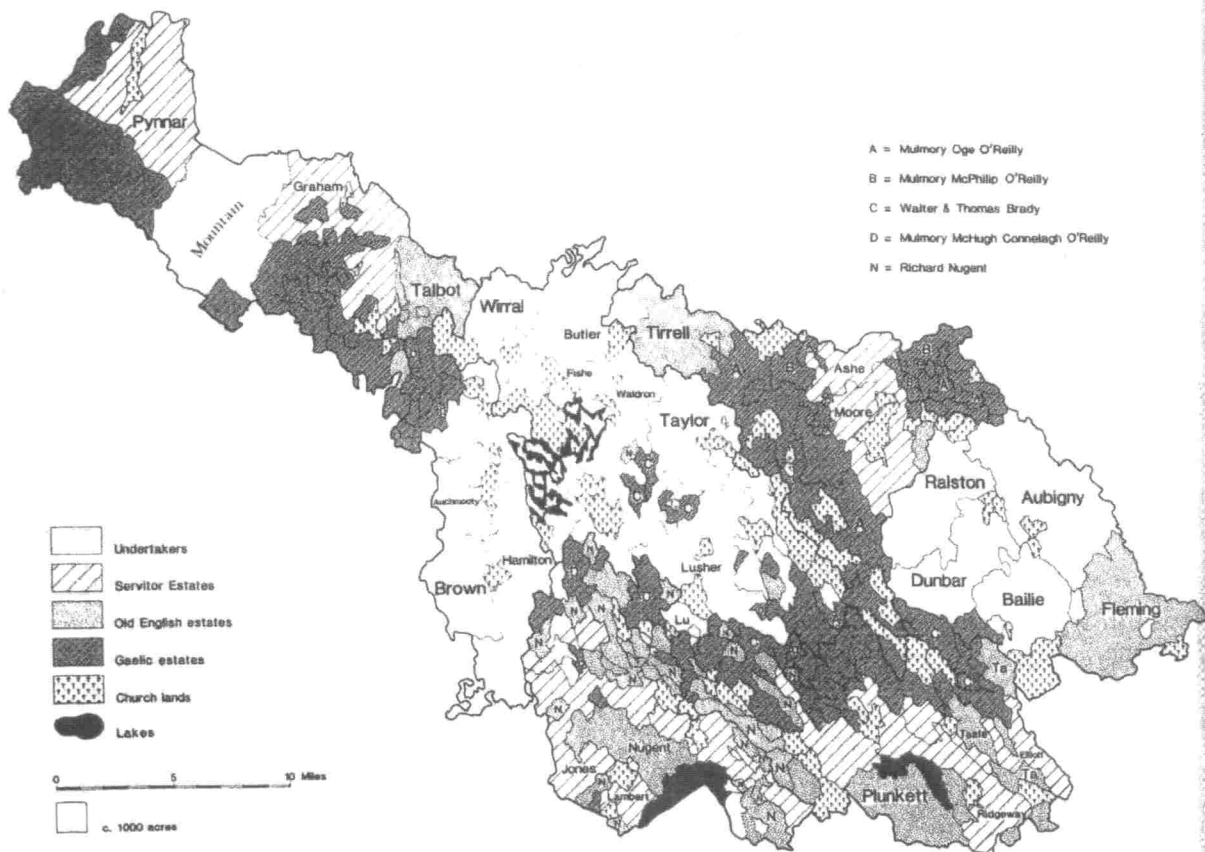

*Figure 4* Ulster plantation allocation of lands in Cavan, 1610–20

which is well-reflected in the map showing extensive 'Old English' estates relatively untouched by the plantation. Edward Dowdall, a Castlerahan landlord, was described in the 1622 survey as being a recusant with several tenants from the Pale. In this sense, the servitor contribution to the Cavan settlement may have diverged somewhat from the original intentions of the planners of the scheme. Palesmen probably had less commitment to a radical change in society and settlement on their new estates than had British settlers. The beginnings of the substantial modification of some parts of the landscape appear in the early plantation surveys, however. In 1622, for example, Sir Richard Waldron's estate in Loughtee was described as having thirty houses with English families, 'a windmill and very good tillage, inclosures and stores of English cattle'.[19] In contrast, the native Irish estates—and some Palesmen's lands, such as Dowdall's—continued older patterns of landuse, including ploughing by the tail 'with their garrans'.

Though one should not assume that the geography of plantation estates shaped all subsequent landscape patterns—much land changed hands throughout the seventeenth century for example—it is not entirely a coincidence that the distribution of Protestants in the landscape of the county in 1861 (see figure 10, p. 33), shows especially low proportions in the districts allotted to Gaelic, Old English and servitor landowners in the early seventeenth century. In contrast, the largest Protestant communities, up to and exceeding one-third of the 1861 electoral division populations, were to be found mainly in the areas allotted to Scottish and English undertakers as part of the plantation scheme.

Though there were some changes in personnel, the undertaker estates continued and consolidated their position up to 1641 (figure 5). The native Irish estates, amounting to about twenty-two per cent of the profitable land of the county in 1610, fell to sixteen per cent in 1641. Evidence suggests that Gaelic landholders generally in Ireland at this time experienced contraction and decline in the face of superior land management and investment strategies by the new British settlers.[20] Although it is difficult to identify precisely the ethnic origin of some of the individuals concerned, it appears that the Old English further consolidated their grip on the lands of Cavan, especially in the southern part of the county, before 1641. The Cromwellian land settlement subsequently made a clean sweep of extensive parts of mid- and south-west Cavan (figure 6). Some of the Old English properties survived the change, but all the native Irish properties changed to settler hands. The essential difference between the Ulster plantation scheme, with its emphasis on colonial settlement and community development, and the Cromwellian confiscation, was that the latter placed little or no emphasis on settlement. Much of the Cromwellian settlement was characterised by the assembly of extensive estates by predatory land speculators. In the south of Cavan, for example, new owners such as the Massereenes, Beresfords, Lewises and Cootes appeared. In Tullyhaw in the north-west of the county, the Massereenes,

Figure 5 (above) 1641 ownership of lands in Cavan
Figure 6 (below) Cromwellian land grants in county Cavan
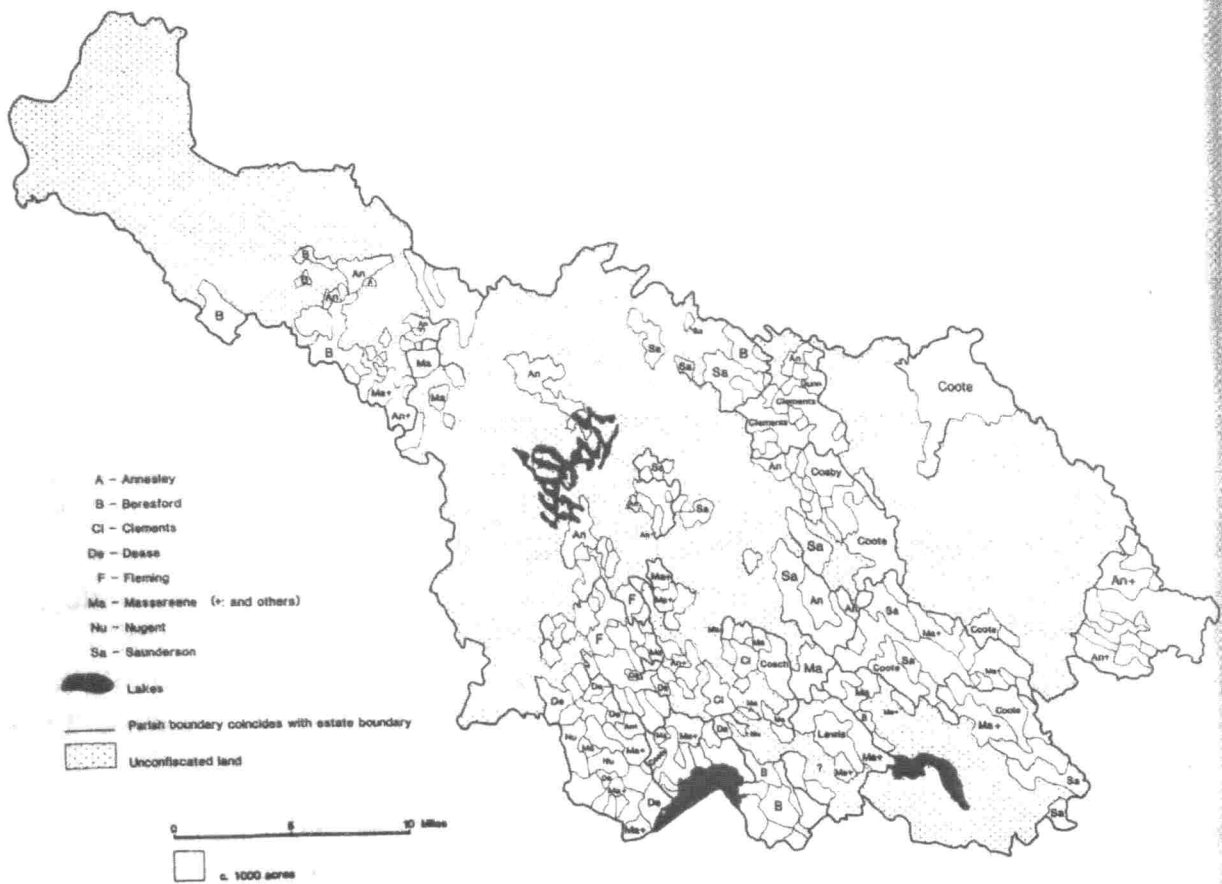
Beresfords and Cootes again appear. Families such as Annesley, Massereene, Saunderson, Coote and others were involved in many land deals, throughout south Ulster and further afield, often involving soldiers' land shares. Annesley, one of the commissioners for the Cromwellian settlement, was involved in over twenty shares in Cavan not counting deals in a dozen other Irish counties. Together with genuine small grantees who settled on their properties, the Cromwellian programme established a pattern of small estates, many of which were subsequently consolidated in a variety of speculative land deals.

The territorial and social structure of estates, which had emerged by the nineteenth century from the seventeenth century revolution in landownership, is the key to understanding much of the modern landscape of Cavan (figure 7). Towns and villages, farms, roads, railways and housing patterns can all be understood within a framework of estate management, the effectiveness of which varied greatly over a county containing, as Jones Hughes has pointed out, 'the tail end of Ireland's most complicated web of great landed properties' extending into south-east Ulster.[21] The largest and most consolidated estates were to be found in the baronies of Upper and Lower Loughtee, Clankee and Tullyhunco—which had been allocated to undertakers in the Ulster plantation—and Tullygarvey, where some notable Cromwellian estates had been assembled. The most valuable estate properties extended from the Coote lands on the Monaghan border to Lord Farnham's property around Cavan town. It is also clear that many of the estates in Cavan were highly fragmented. The Farnham, Saunderson, Annesley and Garvagh estates, for example, were scattered over an extensive area, a reflection of the speculative origins of many of these properties in the previous centuries. Figure 7 also identifies estates whose owners were absentee in 1876, as well as estates with houses and demesnes, both of which give a rough indication of levels of management, investment and interest in their properties by landowners. The map, however, takes no account of the problem of non-residence on estates in the preceding century and it probably understates the real effect of absenteeism in that many of the landowners may have lived only part of the year in Cavan. These details correlate strongly with Jones Hughes' map of the valuation of estates in 1870. Measured by these criteria the landscapes in Cavan in which the forces of modernisation were most extensive ran from Cootehill to Cavan and Belturbet, with another district adjoining the Longford–Meath border. In addition to houses and demesnes, these areas also supported a suite of towns and villages which originated in the conditions of the Ulster plantation. With the county town of Cavan on the Farnham estate, all of these towns were associated with strong estate cores. On the other hand, the poor barony of Tullyhaw, and comparatively poor lands of Clankee were characterised by a high level of absenteeism among landowners. In these poor areas, and also in districts running westwards from Shercock to the Leitrim border, non-resident fragments of property were accompanied by wide variations in leasing arrangements, rental valuations and general levels of estate management to
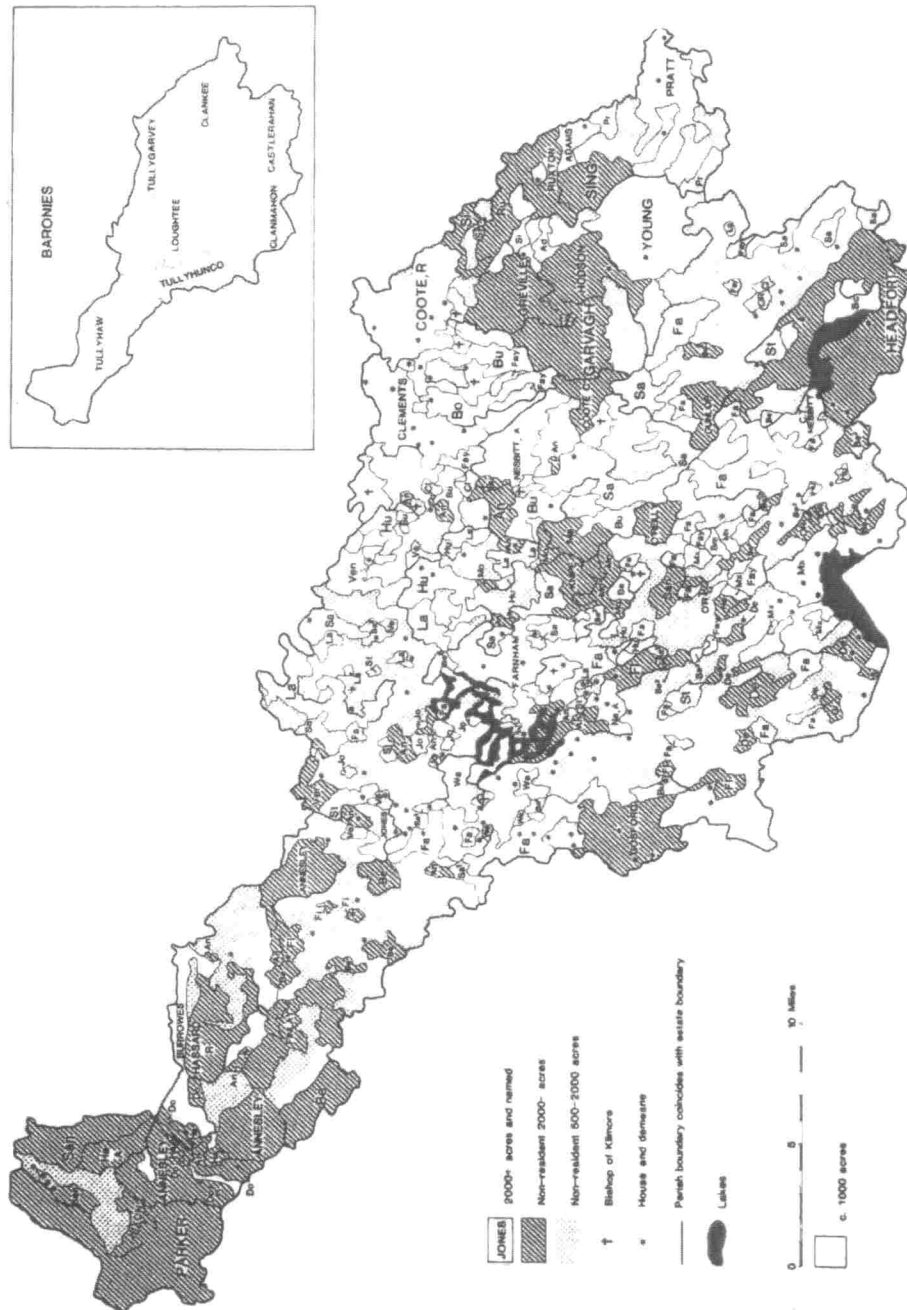
Index to Figure 7

Except where indicated in brackets below, the first two letters of the landowner's name are printed on the map where the property is too small to include the whole name.

Adams, Benjamin
Annesley, earl of
Beresford, Lord (Be)
Beresford, John (Be 1)
Beresford, J.D. (Be 2)
Boyle, Maxwell
Burrowes
Clements, Theophilus
Coote, Richard
Coote, Charles
Dease, Gerald
Dobbs, Leonard
Dunlop, Mrs

Farnham, Lord
Fay, James
Finlay
Fleming, Maj.-Gen.
Garvagh, Lady
Gosford, earl of
Greville, Col.
Hassard, Alexander
Hassard, Richard
Headfort, Marquis of
Hodson, Sir George
Humphreys, William
Jones, John C.

Knipe, John
Lanesboro, earl of
Marley, Louisa
Maxwell, Somerset
Moore, Samuel
Nesbitt, C.T.
Nesbitt, A.
Nixon
O'Reilly, Anthony
Parker
Pratt, Col.
Ruxton, William
Saunders, Richard (San)

Saunderson, Col. Alex (Sa)
Saunderson, Mrs Mary (Sa 2)
Scott
Smith, William
Singleton, Henry
Storey, Jane
Venables, Revd E.B.
Vernere, John
Young, Sir John (Lord Lisgar)
Wallace

Figure 7   Cavan estates in the mid-nineteenth century

produce what has been called more 'haphazard, unregulated and protracted processes of colonisation and settlement'.[22]

IV

In the process of settling and developing the landscape for human use, societies invariably shape that landscape according to the norms, values and priorities of their particular culture. This produces what have been called 'humanised' or cultural landscapes which reflect many of their cultural characteristics. The territorial structure of the Cavan landscape, for example, is an important component in understanding its nature. The hierarchy of places such as townlands, parishes and baronies represents the process of 'territorialisation' of the landscape which can be viewed as both a by-product of and a pre-requisite for economic and cultural development. This territorial structure is the framework within which all the processes of landscape modification and change occur and within which they can be best understood. In the course of settling any region, one of the earliest processes was an ongoing division and subdivision of the landscape as part of its organisation for human use. In general, it might be said that this division into territories reflects the economic and social priorities of the culture group. In Ireland we have inherited a tangled web of territorial divisions which reflects this historical process. Most of these divisions represent the state at which society's territorialisation had arrived by the late sixteenth century, when new English colonial policies began to record, for confiscation or sale, land and property in Ireland. Some layers of territorial order were in the process of becoming defunct; others had long since disappeared. The early political territories of Gaelic Ireland—the tuatha—may have dissappeared by the late middle ages, but their shadowy reflections can be seen in many of the barony boundaries. The counties, of course, represent in the main the crown's adaptation of existing Gaelic political lordships in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Ballybetaghs, which persisted throughout many Gaelic regions up to the early and mid-seventeenth century and which represented the variety of sept lands held under Gaelic landownership systems, became defunct following the seventeenth-century settlements. However, it is possible that their shape and extent influenced the geography of many of the estates which emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

A further unit, the parish, based on these secular landownership structures of ballybetagh and lordship and focussed on small country churches, was given official status following the twelfth-century church reforms. This was reinforced by their adoption by the Church of Ireland in the sixteenth century. These parishes survived as important units for various civil administrative functions up to the twentieth century. The territorial manifestation of the Catholic church parochial structure reflected the expression of an outlawed

Figure 8   Civil and Catholic parishes of county Cavan

and impoverished institution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In many parts of the country, especially areas of manorial settlement with their tiny parish units, ad hoc arrangements which bore little resemblance to the obsolete medieval parishes emerged. The latter were maintained by the Established Church more for legal, property and income reasons than for any evangelical or congregational reason. In south Ulster, however, where a fairly substantial Protestant community gave a semblance of viability to the large Gaelic medieval parishes, the Catholic church found little difficulty in continuing to operate in these units.[23] For this reason, as in Monaghan and to a lesser extent parts of Fermanagh, the medieval and Catholic parishes in Cavan are largely identical, as figure 8 shows.

The smallest territorial unit to survive from the medieval period is the townland, which has become so close to the lives of rural dwellers now that it is often taken for granted. Though there are many conflicting views on the origins of these units, in general it seems that townlands are the fairly extensive remnants of a fundamental landholding layer in the middle ages. Reflecting the 'local-ness' of pre-modern society, these land units had a variety of local designations. These appear in the seventeenth century evidence as tates in Monaghan and Fermanagh, polls in Cavan, ballyboes, ploughlands, cartrons elsewhere.[24] The term 'townland' became universal with the standardisation which came with incorporation in a modern centralising state in the seventeenth century. The townlands, effectively a territorial expression of land assessments—areas which had an established customary stocking capacity, for cows usually—probably also operated as the equivalent of a family holding. Certainly following the revolution in landownership in the seventeenth century, this small territorial unit became the basic unit for tenurial purposes. With the parishes, this unit also became the basic unit for the collection of data by central and local government from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries making it a useful unit for historical study.

In Cavan, using the coarse web of parishes as an averaging medium, it is possible to see hints of the territorial logic in these divisions. The baronies of Upper and Lower Loughtee, for example, which contain some of the best land in the county, have the smallest average townland size. In Kilmore parish, the townlands average 165 acres, in Urney 157, Annagelliff 183, Drumlane 157, Castleterra 133, Drung 164 and Annagh 191 acres. This contrasts with townlands in excess of 300 acres in the south eastern hills of Cavan, where the land is poorer—in Lavey 313 acres, Killinkere 326, Bailieborough 332 and Castlerahan with 330 acres. Predictably they are also extensive in the northwest parishes of Kinawley (290 acres), Killinagh (300 acres) and Templeport (250 acres). Here it is likely that many of these units emerged quite late, probably in the later eighteenth century, as population expanded into previously unsettled mountainous districts. There are noticeable variations between the average size of townlands in Monaghan and in Cavan, and it would seem safe to assume that this range of sizes in Cavan

simply reflects the internal territorial organisation of the land resources in the
south-Ulster lordships of Breifne and Airghialla.

The process of the territorialisation of the landscape did not stop at poll,
tate or townland level. These units were subdivided, possibly in response to
population pressure and landholding fragmentation, and this is reflected in
Cavan's micro units of pints, pottles, and gallons, for example. In the eight-
eenth century subdivision as far down as field units continued as part of the
day-to-day running of a farm. Enclosures began following the Ulster planta-
tion. With reclamation and drainage, enclosures were encouraged through the
aegis of the larger estates. Throughout the eighteenth century one would
expect that agents and estate managers, such as those on the Headfort estate
in the 1740s, would have tried to introduce some order into the progress of
hedges and ditching by tenant farmers by, for example, including clauses for
enclosure in leases. One popular device was to offer free quicksets to tenants
to encourage planting. On smaller, more fragmented and often absentee prop-
erties, enclosure progressed largely through the initiative of the occupiers of
the lands rather than through landlord intervention. Indeed subdivision and
subletting of farms, one of the principal landscape media for pre-Famine
population growth, was effectively a tenant initiative.[25] The farm was the
community's workspace where changes were wrought in response to the exi-
gencies of the market or the dictates of landowners or necessities of survival.
As well as considering farm structure it might be possible at this level to
discern differences in land and estate management in the layout of fields. On
a broad regional or national scale there are certainly correlations between field
and farm size, with small farm regions being characterised by small average
fields. In maps the Cavan borderland emerges strikingly on the southern
frontier of a small farm and small field region abutting on the larger farms
and fields of the midlands (figure 9).

Naming the landscape was another fundamental aspect of the process of
territorialisation. Topomyns are especially important as indicators of cultural
landscapes. This south Ulster borderland strikingly reflects in its townland
names the medieval frontier with the Pale. Southwards across this frontier
there is a significant increase in the number of English placenames in the Pale,
and Breifne's borders are marked by an overwhelmingly Gaelic named land-
scape which relates exclusively to the physical qualities of the environment,
though those districts adjoining the midlands contain an above-average number
of names with cultural connotations. As one would expect, hilliness is a
quality which is repeatedly reflected in the names. There is a wide variety of
Irish names for hills—for long hills, round hills, flat hills, towering hills—
subtle expressions of the value of the land and its utility for farmers or cattle-
men of the middle ages: lurgan, tulach, cabhán, cor, mullach, cnoc. The most
common name elements in the whole south Ulster area are Druim, Cor, Coill,
Doire and Mullach. The bottom lands and the lakeshores, which also feature
largely in perceptions of this drumlin landscape, have names which refer to
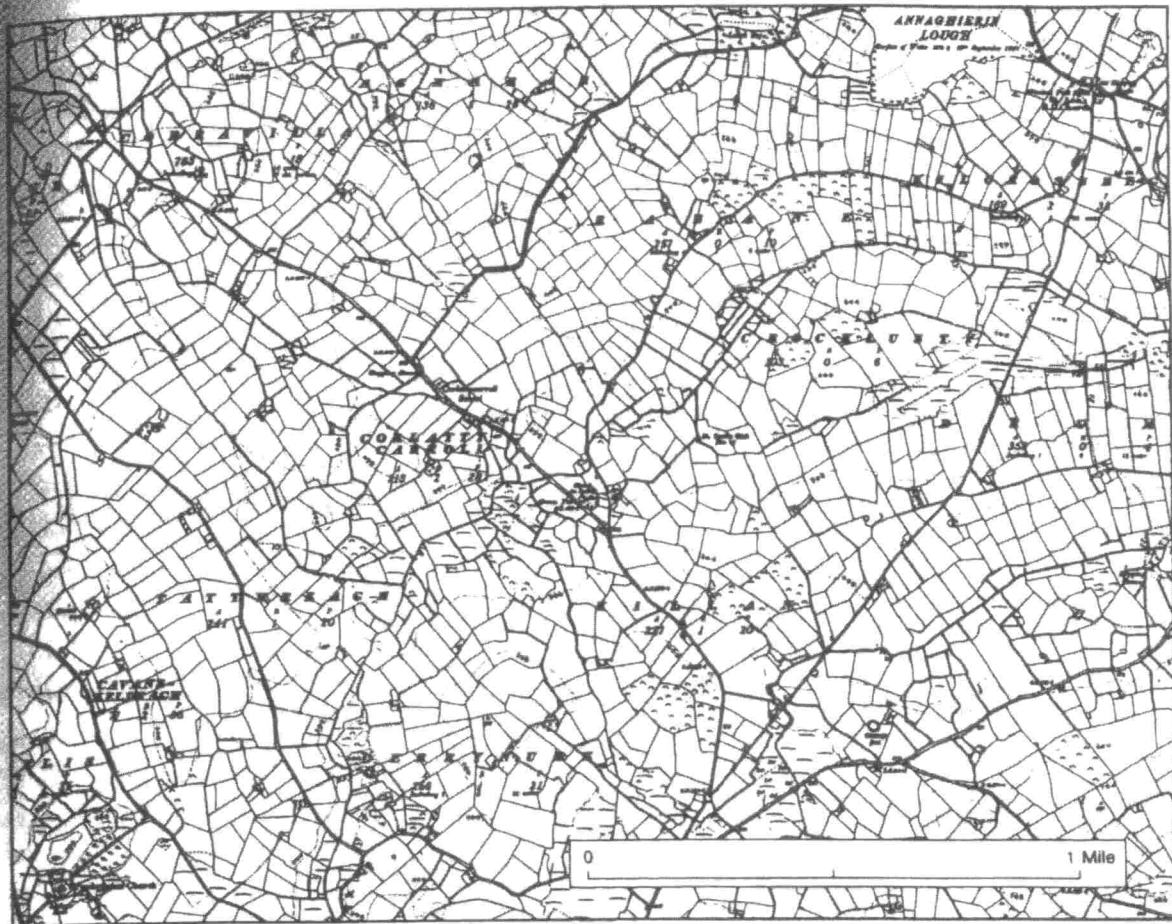
Figure 9 Field patterns. *Ordnance Survey*

botanical features particularly, such as doire and coill, as well as eanach and cluain.[26]

The townland names have been fortuitously recorded as part of seventeenth century land confiscations. However, there existed a plethora of other names for smaller divisions of land, which were not sytematically recorded. Many, like field names, were probably late in origin; many are in English and probably changed frequently as memories faded. Examples across south Ulster refer to the characteristics of fields in terms of shape, size, quality, or other distinctive features. These local names which are an intimate part of the cultural landscape have fallen out of use with decline in the numbers of farms and the intensity of farming. Many have been recorded in an unsystematic manner by the Folklore Department in University College Dublin or have been occasionally published in local historical journals.

It is interesting that in most Ulster counties there was no transformation in placenames by the immigrant settler communities to match the other changes they instigated in the morphology of the landscape. Clearly the land was already well named, and the secure transfer and maintenance of ownership of the land throughout the seventeenth century depended on the accurate retention of the existing Gaelic nomencalture. By contrast, the names of the towns,

which were introduced as part of the plantation, are dramatically successful expressions of the new order which was being imposed in this remote corner of south Ulster. Names like Virginia, Kingscourt, Bailieborough, Cootehill or Butlersbridge, all vibrant country markets in this densely populated country-side, speak volumes of the colonial intent and achievement of the plantation scheme. Later, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, house names came to reflect another passing fad in naming the landscape. Essentially an English import the custom was established by the landowning class to complement their newly built mansions and demenses. In the wider countryside it is likely that house naming was undertaken mainly by the bigger farmers, who in south Ulster were almost invariably the descendants of the seventeenth century settlers. A great many of the houses simply adopted the townland name in a gesture of superiority over the more lowly inhabitants of the place, for example, Lisdrum House or Arboy Lodge. Many however adopted fanciful English names (especially incorporating 'lodge' or 'cottage'), betraying an awareness of where their cultural priorities, if not antecedents, lay. In some ways, this preoccupation of the last century is akin in its cultural impact to today's fixation with names like Tuscany or Aylesbury Downs, The Cloisters, The Willows and other names for modern housing developments in Irish towns.[27] Around Cavan, in the last century, there were houses with names like Mount Prospect, Earlsvale, Fort Lodge, Groveview Lodge, Waterloo Cottage; near Virginia, there were Grousehall, Rockmount, Fortwilliam, New Prospect; in the neighbourhood of Cootehill, no doubt bathing in the reflected glory of Bellamount House, were Ashfield Lodge, Rockdell, Millvale, Faybrook View, Rockford Cottage. Though these names have been recorded in the Ordnance Survey's six-inch maps of the region, it is doubtful if many of them persist to this day and the class which introduced them has for the most part vanished from the countryside.

Religious belief is a fundamental cultural trait. Apart from obvious land-scape symbols such as churches, rectories, and perhaps Orange Halls, religion in Ireland has had an important formative role in the landscape generally. The immigrant settlers who came in the seventeenth century in response to English colonial policy were Protestant in the main and land acquisition and exploitation were their primary objectives. This meant that Protestant communities only fully developed in depth where land resources and prospects were viable and it was here that they attempted to achieve their objective of introducing English style 'civility' in tidy enclosed landscapes with arable predominating over pasture. There was a two-fold process throughout south Ulster of Protestant consolidation on the good lands and withdrawal from poorer lands, to which the Catholic population was gradually displaced. This process was also linked with the territorial expression of bigger estates, which in Cavan had developed most successfully on the older undertaker areas or where some post Cromwellian settlements, like that of the Coote family, were successful. In 1861, twenty per cent of the Cavan population was Protestant,
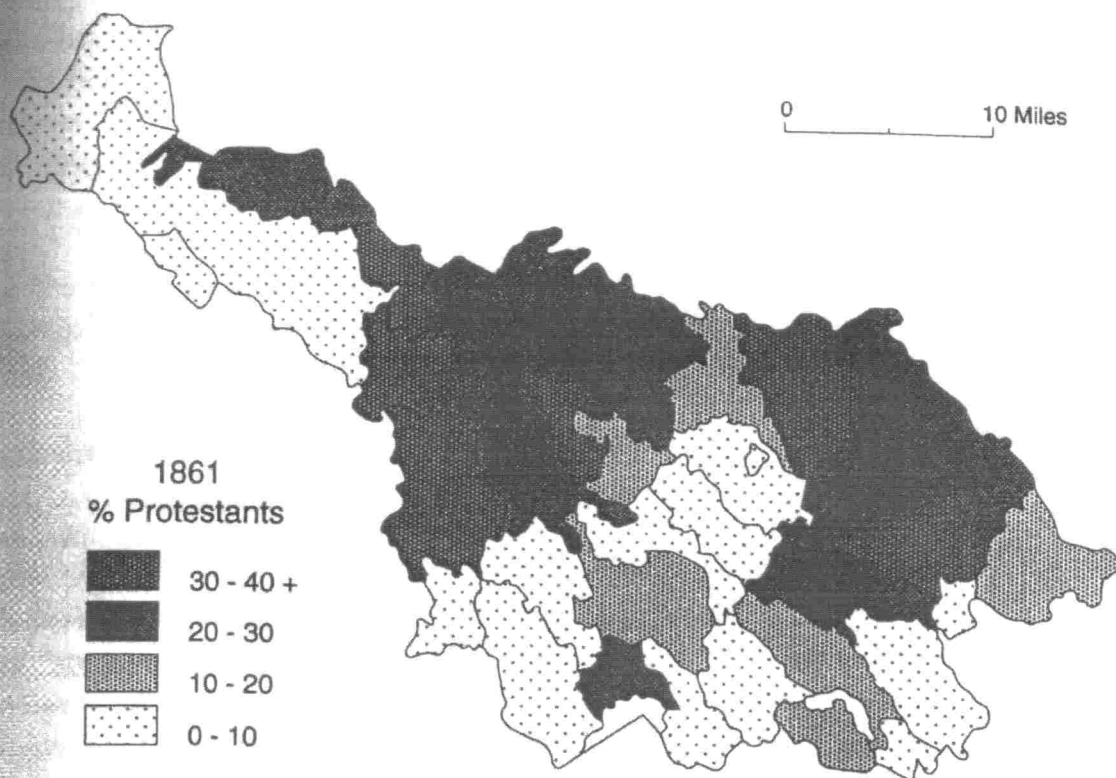
Figure 10 Distribution of Protestants in county Cavan, 1861

overwhelmingly Church of Ireland (figure 10). The single variable of the Protestant population mapped for 1861, reflects a whole series of linked factors that impacted on the landscape. Districts where more than one-fifth of the population was Protestant are linked to the environmentally-favoured areas where undertaker settlement was significant, and to areas of large estates with highly valued cores and high levels of residency and management. In these regions, therefore, there was a substantial Protestant class living in a landscape which reflected a well-established and stable rural management structure of big farms, big well-hedged fields, good farmhouses and a sprinkling of country mansions and demenses.

V

That there was an intimate link between the parcellation of the land among its occupiers and the shaping of the landscape is obvious. This is dramatically exemplified in almost any landscape on the western seaboard, the 'new west' whose fields were literally manufactured by its inhabitants. Whether or not they were controlled or ignored by the landowners, it was the small farmers of Cavan who girdled the hillsides with their houses, paths and lanes; their 'streets', farmyards and haggards; as well as barn lofts, byres and cart houses,

they divided their hills into fields and planted the hedgescapes. Together with the mills and blacksmiths' shops, tea shops, chapels and churches, schoolhouses and public houses, they defined the social texture of the landscape up to the early twentieth century. The vernacular landscape of one-storied and, in the early twentieth century, two-storied farmhouses on the side of the hill linked by narrow lanes with the road was very characteristic of the small-farm landscape of south Ulster.

In the 1841 census, the Cavan and Leitrim drumlin belt represented the southernmost extremity of some of the most densely populated districts in Ireland. The parts of Cavan adjoining county Monaghan, for example, had settlement densities in excess of 400 persons per square mile, which they shared with much of Monaghan, south Armagh and the Lagan valley. This level of intensity of occupation and fragmentation of the land was a product of the opportunities offered tenants by the domestic linen industry in the late eighteenth century. By the mid nineteenth century, however, when the domestic stage of the industry was in rapid decline, these densities and the tiny farms and fields which accompanied them, were measures of great rural poverty.[28] In Cavan the smallest, poorest farms were found in parishes along the Monaghan border, across the middle of the county and in the north west, a pattern showing uncanny links with areas of Cromwellian land speculation in the seventeenth century, speculation that was based on an environmental legacy of poor land resources.

It was out of these landscapes of poverty that thousands of people emigrated continuously up to the 1950s, unable to cope with their deprivation or rejecting their limited opportunities. The pattern of rural decline in the twentieth century once again illuminates some well-worn structures—the north west, north east and mid-county districts losing half or more of their 1911 populations by the end of the 1950s. In contrast, the historic centre of the county, the old lucht tigh lands around Cavan town maintained their population levels, as did districts around some of the small country towns.

Demographic decline meant a slow contraction in the lineaments of the landscape of many areas, lanes overgrown and derelict, farmhouses and fields in the marginal edges abandoned. Much of the fieldscape of Cavan, however, has remained unchanged since the mid-nineteenth century. Since the 1960s, gradually one part, then another, of this characteristic Cavan landscape has had new houses added. The emergence of the bungalowed countrysides, which signified a new chapter in the making of the landscape, and the imposition of much more universal, standardised artifacts—verandahs with double garages, cypress hedges, lawns and rockeries—paralleled the disappearing small farms which are being replaced with bigger farms and large industrial farm buildings.

VI

Most of the cultural and economic processes which have been discussed here have obvious ideological and political ramifications. The relationship between Ireland and Britain, for many centuries, was unquestionably a political one and it has been argued that Ireland's regional economic structure and the spatial expression of its regional landscapes have been induced by the nature of the colonial relationship with England. Certainly the Ulster plantation had a political motivation and the fruits of this are clear in the ethno-political geography of south Ulster, where Breifne's ancient boundary with Fir Mánach was promoted to international frontier status in 1921.

As we began, so we return to the primacy of regional location as a factor of significance in understanding Cavan. The establishment of the political border redefined Cavan—and other south Ulster regions—as peripheral to two states and undoubtedly retarded their economic development potential. Fermanagh, with which Cavan and Leitrim had intimate links for centuries, became the 'west' in Northern Ireland. Cavan likewise became marginalised on the north-western edge of the Irish Free State. In political and economic terms it was later redefined as administratively part of the west, a return to its late medieval regional context: Connacht and the 'three counties of Ulster' became one region, as the Undeveloped and Disadvantaged Areas of the 1950s.

The political processes which led to particular definitions of landscape and regions, have also provided the context for a range of ideology-based inter-pretations of landscapes and events. Ultimately it may be conceded that the foregoing thoughts on influences in the making of the Cavan landscape may be revised or represented differently by different points of view. 'Competing interests—ecological, commercial and spiritual—produce opposing textual readings' of landscape.[29] Today when there are so many environmental pres-sures, numerous lobbies have emerged to present a variety of viewpoints on landscapes and environments. One can talk of 'constructions' of landscape heritage, for example, and with the expansion of the tourism industry and especially the tourism-driven growth of interest in heritage, there is increasing emphasis on different approaches to representing and interpreting our cul-tural heritage and cultural landscapes. Interpretations of the west of Ireland and the meaning of its landscapes, for instance, can result in 'varied versions of the West'.[30] The distinctive landscapes of the west of Ireland have been represented in the fiction of J.M. Synge and W.B. Yeats, in the paintings of Paul Henry and Sean Keating, in song and folklore and in the writings of scholars like Estyn Evans. Today the west has a vocal lobby to represent it as a region of depopulation and decline in need of state support. In south Ulster, a nationalist interpretation of the events which led to the creation of the Republic of Ireland and the separation of Cavan from its northern hinterland would contrast with that of a unionists. A Cavan Catholic's interpretation of

the origins and achievement of the Ulster plantation might be quite different from that of a Protestant from Bailieborough. Brian Graham has tried to come to terms with the intricacies of cultural identity in Ireland and Ulster, and, among other things, its repercussions for understanding the landscape. He suggests that 'if the meaning of heritage icons is ideologically driven, then revisionism must lead to an academic re-evaluation or even redefinition of that iconography' and heritage's 'meaning must alter as the definition of that which it represents changes'.[31] The understanding of the Big House and demesne is a case in point.

One could also say (with Patrick Kavanagh) that the Cavan farmer's jaundiced view of his fields and hills will differ from those of the Dublin or foreign tourist's view of these same 'little lyrical fields'. Feminist ideologies can also see places in a different light: the landscape as the home of women. Some women writers have suggested that not enough attention has been paid to the work of Estyn Evans, for example, in examining the minutiae and intimate detail of domestic landscapes of vernacular houses and farmyards which undoubtedly reflect the influence of generations of womenfolk.[32] Ideological points of view or differing social or economic perspectives might bring different understandings to bear on a range of landscape artifacts—the development of enclosures, the backstreets of the town, the locations of Catholic or Protestant churches, the place of the landed estates, the Big House and rural settlement patterns. Just as the Great Famine as a towering event in the nineteenth century is being re-examined from a variety of perspectives, its landscape setting might also be reappraised in the light of different attitudes to the participants in this chapter of tragedy.

VII

There are a variety of approaches to understanding the making of the landscape of Cavan. Many such approaches use traditional sources, others demand innovative interrogation of traditional interpretations. All of them emphasise the importance of the past in explaining and understanding our landscape heritage, as well as the need to appreciate the significance of even our ordinary landscapes as points of contact with our past.

> And the newness that was in every stale thing
> When we looked at it as children: the spirit-shocking
> Wonder in a black slanting Ulster hill
> Or the prophetic astonishment in the tedious talking
> Of an old fool will awake for us and bring
> You and me to the yard gate to watch the whins
> And the bog-holes, cart-tracks, old stables where Time begins.
>
> Patrick Kavanagh, 'Advent'

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PERSPECTIVES ON THE MAKING OF THE CAVAN LANDSCAPE
P. J. Duffy

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3 Seamus Heaney, 'The sense of the past' in *History Ireland*, i, no. 4 (1993), p. 33.

4 See P.J. Duffy, 'Conflicts in heritage and tourism' in Ullrick Kockel (ed.), *Culture, tourism and development* (Liverpool, 1994), pp. 77–86.

5 Lowenthal and Prince, 'The English landscape', p. 325.

6 For example Henry Glassie, *Passing the time in Ballymenone* (Dublin, 1982).

7 Pat Sheerin, 'The narrative creation of place: the example of Yeats', in Timothy Collins (ed.), *Decoding the landscape* (Galway, 1994), p. 151.

8 Sir James Perrott, *The chronicle of Ireland, 1584–1608*, ed. Herbert Wood (Dublin, 1933), p. 84 and Bernadette Cunningham's essay in this volume.

9 Ciaran Brady, 'The O'Reillys of Breifne and the problem of "surrender and regrant"' in *Breifne*, vi, no. 23 (1985), pp. 233–62.

10 Perrott, *Chronicle of Ireland*, p. 114.

11 The Revd George Hill in his *Historical account of the plantation in Ulster* (Belfast, 1877), suggested that the use of English terms of liquid measurement, such as pints and pottles, for land areas in Breifne possibly was a reflection of longstanding English commercial influences from the pale, (p. 112).

12 P. O Gallachair (ed.), '1622 survey of Cavan' in *Breifne*, i, no. 1 (1958), p. 61.

13 Oliver Davies, 'The castles of county Cavan' in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 3rd ser., xi (1948), p. 115.

14 Quoted in Philip O'Connell, *The schools and scholars of Breiffne* (Dublin 1942), p. 77.

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21 T. Jones Hughes, 'Landholding and settlement in the counties of Meath and Cavan in the nineteenth century' in Patrick O'Flanagan, Paul Ferguson and Kevin Whelan (eds), *Rural Ireland modernisation and change 1600–1900* (Cork, 1987), p. 105.

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26 Duffy, *Landscapes of south Ulster*, pp. 19–20.

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29 Sheerin, 'Narrative creation of place', p. 153.

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CAVAN: A MEDIEVAL BORDER AREA *Ciaran Parker*

1 *A.F.M.*, *A.U.*, 1128; This event is included under the year 1126 in *Miscellaneous Irish annals (A.D. 1114–1437)*, ed. Séamus Ó hInnse (Dublin, 1947).

2 See Katharine Simms, 'The O'Reillys and the kingdom of east Breifne' in *Breifne*, v no. 19, (1979), p. 318, n. 9.

3 *A.F.M.*, 1155, 1161, 1162; *A.U.*, 1161; Eamonn de hÓir (ed.), 'Annála as Breifne' in *Breifne*, iv, no. 13 (1970), p. 62.

4 See A.J. Otway-Ruthven, *A history of medieval Ireland* (London, 1968), pp. 62–3.

5 G.H. Orpen (ed.), *The song of Dermot and the earl* (Oxford, 1892), lines 1740, 1788, 1909.

6 *A.F.M.*, 1184; *A.L.C.*, 1198.

7 *A.L.C.*, 1186.

8 G.H. Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans* (4 vols, Oxford, 1911–20), iii, p. 32.

9 Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, iii, p. 32; Oliver Davies, 'The castles of county Cavan: part 1' in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 3rd ser, x (1947), pp. 77–8. They may have been built in association with an unsuccessful attack on the Uí Ruairc in 1196 (*A.L.C.*, 1196).

10 Oliver Davies and D.B. Quinn (eds), 'The Irish pipe roll of 14 John, 1211–12' in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 3rd ser. iv, supplement (July 1941), pp. 22–5. There is no evidence to support Professor Otway-Ruthven's argument that the castles were built by de Lacy prior to his forfeiture. (Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, pp. 89–90).

11 Davies, Quinn (eds), 'The Irish pipe roll, 1211–12', p. 44.

12 *A.L.C.*, *A.F.M.*, *Ann. Clon.*, 1220; de hÓir, 'Annála as Breifne', p. 63. For a discussion of the origins of Clough Oughter Castle see Connleth Manning, 'Clough Oughter Castle' in *Breifne*, viii, no. 1 (1990), pp. 20–38.

13 W.W. Shirley (ed.), *Royal and other historical letters illustrative of the reign of Henry III* (2 vols, London, Rolls series, 1862), i, pp. 500–3; *A.F.M.*, 1226.

14 *Ann. Clon.*, *Ann. Conn.*, *A.F.M.*, *A.L.C.*, *A.U.*, 1233; de hÓir, 'Annála as Breifne', p. 63.

15 *Ann. Conn.*, *A.F.M.*, *A.U.*, 1250.