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An XIV Comhdháil Idirnáisiúnta sa Léann Ceilteach

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OLLAMH, BIATACH, COMHARBA: LIFEWAYS OF GAEOLIC LEARNED FAMILIES IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN IRELAND

ELIZABETH FIZTPATRICK
School of Geography and Archaeology, NUI Galway

INTRODUCTION

Research on the manuscripts produced by Gaelic learned professions is a distinguished area of Celtic scholarship which has traditionally focused on biographies of particular learned families or individual learned men1 and the products of their schools.2 The learned classes and their works have also been given new contexts in recent scholarship. Katharine Simms has pioneered ways in which poetry can be used to inform landscape and economy3, dwellings4 and warfare;5 and Damian McManus has proposed a setting for the grammatical tracts, through his exploration of the environment of the bardic school.6

The aim of this paper is to open discussion about the physical environments in which learned families lived, farmed and conducted schools, specifically through an exploration of their settlement archaeology, landholdings and the place-names associated with them. Those elements are integral to understanding the role and identity of the learned professions in later medieval and early modern Irish society to c.1600. A landscape approach also suggests that partial views of earlier royal settlements can be achieved through the lens of later medieval learned

family holdings, and that the ways in which they used their land may have informed the composition of later demesnes in particular landscapes of early modern Ireland.

An ollamh (master of a learned or skilled profession), always male, and the representative of his sept, combined several roles, especially in the case of those who conducted schools of senchas and poetry. Generally, he did not confine himself to his primary hereditary profession but crossed over into areas of allied traditional arts. Simms has shown that the poetic art was studied in law schools, and that poetic judges of Brehon law were a feature of the learned classes. Manuscripts of the schools also tended to contain a broad range of material, not just profession-specific texts. In the sixteenth century, the Úi Dhubh dá Bhóireann law school at Cathair Mhic Neachtain in the Burren uplands of Co. Clare had the ‘Amra Choluium Chille’, for instance, among its manuscript collections. It was copied in 1552 by a scribe called Forannán for his patron, Mac Fhíannachda, who conducted a law school at Cnoc Fionn in Baile Mhic Fhíannachda on the Atlantic coast of southwest Clare. A colophon (fol. 12vb) reveals the scribe’s name, the date of composition of the manuscript and the places where it was compiled:

A prayer for him who wrote this book from the beginning to the end.
In Cathair Mhie Neachtain near Aro na mBreò it was begun, and its completion [was] in Baile Mhie Fhíannachda, near my patron, i.e.
Domhnall Óg Mac Fhíannachda. I am Forannán, who wrote this for him and for every one God would wish [to see it]. And the age of the Lord is: twelve years and two twenties and five hundred and one thousand years [AD 1552] up to next Christmas; today it is a fortnight before the 1st of November.

Hybridity in learned roles can also be perceived in family names, such as Mac an Ghabhann (MacGowan) which translates as ‘son of the smith’. Two distinguished branches of this family were respective traditional historians to the Úi Chinnéidigh of Urmhumhá Ùchtarach and to the Úi Lochlainn of Boireann. Mac Raithe Mac an Ghabhann na Sgéal was the principal scribe of a number of genealogies of Irish saints and kings, copied during the

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7 K. Simms, ‘The poetic brehon lawyers of early sixteenth-century Ireland’, Ériu 57 (2007), 121–32: 121–2. Simms explains that two words were used to describe the privileged arts: ‘dán, which meant primarily a talent, a gift from God; and cerd, which meant rather a craft, an acquired skill.’

8 Orait don te ro scribh in leabhar sa o thus co deireadh. A Cathair Meic Neachtain a farrad Aro na mBreò a tionscadab; a forba a mBaile McClandecada a farrad mo goise die. Domhnall Óg Ma (d) Clannacada. Mise Forandan qui scribist sin do fein; dag ach aon darub tóid do Dia sin ais in Domhain i. 2 bliadain. x.; dá xx ii.; u.c. - 0000 [leg. 1000] bliadia [– 1552] cus in Nodluig so eogam, caoisic ria Samuin odie. RIA Ms. Stowe C III 2 [1236]: Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy (Dublin, 1926–70), 3422. I am very grateful to Jacopo Bissigli (NU1, Galway) for this translation and for drawing my attention to the colophon.

9 AFM 1455.12: ‘Mac Gowan of the Stories, i.e. Thomas, son of Gilla-na-naev Mac Gowan, Ollav to O’Loughlin of Corcomroe in history, died’.
mid-fifteenth century for Giolla Ruadháin Ua Macáin, *comharba* of the church of St Ruadháin of Lorhrá in Urmhumhá Iochtarach. The Ormond Meic an Ghabhann are associated with Béal Atha Ghabhann (Ballygown), remembered in the townland names Ballygown north and south at Silvermines in Co. Tipperary. This duality or overlapping of areas of expertise, in families that have their origins as smiths, is a 'syndrome especially evident in the mythical figure of Finn' as poet and outsider who possesses the power and wisdom of the poet or *fili*, but who also has access to legal knowledge and the craft of the smith.  

Apart from being a master, practitioner and custodian of several arts, it is often the case that an *ollamh* was also a hereditary *comharba* (heir to the authority and revenues of the founder of a church) or an *airchinneach* (steward of church lands and buildings), and a *biatach* (food provider/hospitalier) or *fear tighe aoidheadh* (guest-house keeper). This kind of multi-faceted, kin-based, hereditary official is unique to Celtic societies in medieval and early modern Europe.

Equally remarkable is the survival of some of the remains of these families and the potential to determine land-use on their holdings through place-names, topography and上下游 archaeological features. This evidence, used in combination with native chronicle entries, bardic poetry and English administrative sources of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, enables a partial reconstruction of their lifeways.

**Landholding and Landuse**

Determining whether a particular learned family's holding was on mensal land (*lucht tighe*), termon land, or on the sept lands of a lordship can be difficult, but sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English administrative documents, especially inquisitions, fiant and maps, sometimes locate members of the learned profession within the Gaelic landholding matrix. It is often the case too that branches of learned families can be found at significant distances from their original patrimonies, as a result of having found new patrons. The Uí Dhubhghaí of Muinter Bháire in the lordship of Fionn Iarharach, within the Mac Carthaigh Riabhach overlordship of Cairbre in west Cork, and the Mac an Bhaird of Ballymacaward in the lordship of Tír Conaill, are typical examples of such migrations, with the former originating with the sept of that name in the midland territory of Teathbha, and the latter being a branch of Meic an Bhaird of Uí Mhaine.

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12 C.M. O’Sullivan, in a discussion of ‘Hospitality and the Irish guesthouse-keeper’, in *Hospitality in medieval Ireland* 900–1500 (Dublin, 2004), 120–1, notes that ‘the term *biatach*, simply denoting one who supplies food to another, also appears quite frequently throughout the sources for the period under consideration to describe not only the hospitalier, but also the various other types of guesthouse-keepers in medieval Ireland*.

Place-names can also be particularly useful identifiers of lands associated with learned families and can accentuate the synonymy between genealogy and landholding that characterises the geography of Gaelic Ireland. Several of the place-names of learned family landholdings combine the word baile (place) with the family name, as can be seen in Table 1.

These often survive as townland names, but the land denominations concerned may have originally been larger—quarters or ballybetaghsc—covering a greater area than suggested by the name-associated townland. Some of the historically recovered place-names of these learned family holdings have either become detached from their original denominations or they are now obsolete. Ballymackegan, the landholding of the Meic Aodhagáin brehons who served the Ó Fearghail Buidhe of Pallas, in law, in the Southern Anghaile (west and south Longford) lordship of Ó Fearghail Buidhe, is a case where the landholding place-name became extinct. Ballymackegan is twice recorded in the fiants for the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century as an alias for ‘Carrigbegge’ and ‘Corrybegge’, which is identifiable on the first edition Ordnance Survey six-inch map as Carrickbeg townland. The modern townland is very small, at just over 44 acres. By comparing it with the depiction of Carrickbeg on the Down Survey parish map of the mid-seventeenth century (Fig. 1), it is possible to say that the original Carrickbeg, alias Ballymackegan, was larger and

### Table 1—Some correspondences between landholding place-names and learned family names.

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<th>Placename</th>
<th>Family</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ballybrody</td>
<td>Mac Bruaideadh</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>West Clann Chuiléin</td>
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<td>Ballydoogan</td>
<td>Ó Dubhgháin</td>
<td>Senchas</td>
<td>Úi Mhaine</td>
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<td>Ballygown</td>
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<td>Ballyhickey</td>
<td>Ó hileadha</td>
<td>Medicine</td>
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<td>Ballyhoose</td>
<td>Ó hEodhasa</td>
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<td>Fír Mhannach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ballymacaward</td>
<td>Mac an Bhaire</td>
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<td>Ballymackegan</td>
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<td>Law</td>
<td>Southern Anghaile</td>
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<td>Ballyroney</td>
<td>Ó Ruanaidh</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
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<td>West Clann Chuiléin</td>
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<td>sétry</td>
<td>Úi Chonall</td>
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<tr>
<td>sétry</td>
<td>Séit Anghaile</td>
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<tr>
<td>sétry</td>
<td>Úi Eachach Cobha</td>
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Fig. 1—Extract from the Down Survey parish map of Noughaval, Shrule, Co. Longford, showing the townland of Carrickbeg (Carraig) that formed the core of the former Ballymackeghan landholding of the Meic Aodhagain brethren in law to the Ó Fearghail Buidhe of Pallas. Note the woodland of Crevaghbeg and Crevaghmore, which was the site of a livestock raid in 1468 (Reproduced courtesy of Trinity College Dublin).

included portions of the later surrounding townlands of Keel, Carton and Rathmore. Topography also tends to corroborate a view of this learned family landholding as larger than its modern correlative and reveals that its southern end may have been given to a particular use. The northern portion of the townland of Keel, which once lay within Ballymackeghan, contains two deer parks associated with the nearby King-Harmann estate.15

There is a pattern of association between learned family lands and deer parks on later demesnes. This is because the holdings of secular learned families who served the courts of Gaelic lords were situated on the *lucht tighe* or mensal lands of the lordships. The *lucht tighe* incorporated service family lands, hunting grounds, mineral deposits and, often, an assembly place. Hunting grounds and livestock ranges on Gaelic mensal lands tended to be emparked in the early modern period. The later deer parks in Keel occur in open, undulating, rocky pasture, which is indicated as a tree-covered landscape on the Down Survey parish map. The place-names of the townlands of Crevagh Beg (An Chraobhach Bheag) and Crevagh More (An Chraobhach Mhór) that adjoin Carrickbeg (see Fig. 1), indicate a bushy or brachan landscape which would have been an appropriate

environment for deer but also for other livestock such as horses. That there were significant herds of livestock in the vicinity is suggested by a chronicle reference for the year 1468 to a 'Crech mor...forin Craibech hi cois Etihne', a plundering expedition conducted by Ó Conchobhair Failgh on Creevagh, by the River Inny, during which some forty of their packhorses [da n-echáib imachair] were taken.16

The keeping of horses was significant in the Gaelic lordships of Ireland, to the extent that Nicholls has suggested that 'late Gaelic Ireland was probably an equestrian society to a much greater extent than has been generally realised'.17 Horses were kept for a variety of reasons that included breeding, transport, ploughing (with 'garrans' or working-horses) and racing. As Kelly has noted, two main types of horse are distinguished in early medieval sources—the capall fognano and the ech immrinne.18 The capall was a work-horse, probably synonymous with the garran which was used, among other labours, for ploughing, while the ech was a riding-horse or steed. Bardic poetry reveals gift-giving of riding horses to poets in exchange for their services.19 In a poem for Dhomhnall Óg Ó Domhnaill (d. 1281) by Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe, the poet acknowledges that Dhomhnall 'gave a horse for services' to him.20 A eulogy for the Mág Shamhradháin chief of Téllach nEachacho exclaves that he 'keeps all poets alive — such hospitality! Few Gaidhil are freer in giving horses, he refuses nothing to any man.'21

Horse-related place-names are documented on the first edition Ordnance Survey six-inch maps in and adjacent to former landholdings of learned families. Some of these are designated as 'horse park' and 'race course' on modern demesnes that incorporated earlier learned family holdings. On the former lands of a branch of the Úi Chobhthaigh poets at Ballinkeeny,22 which became Mosstown House demesne, southwest of the village of Killare in Westmeath, the emparked landscape includes areas designated as 'horse park and 'race park'. East of the Meic an Ghabhsann lands at Béal Átha Ghobhsann (Ballygown) in Silvermines, 'race park' is noted by the first Ordnance Survey in the townland of Cooleen, which is adjoined on its east side by Deer Park townland. Racing activity in medieval Ireland is generally found in association with an Óenach or tribal assembly place. The occurrence of the place-name 'race course' or 'race park' in conjunction with an attested early medieval assembly site may also indicate a much earlier layer of the territorial palimpsest on learned family holdings. This is intimated, for instance, in a range of place-names in the landscape of the Lagan of Leinster, which was the core patrimonial land of

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16 AConn 1468.38.
17 K.W. Nicholls, Gaelic and gaeltacht Ireland in the middle ages (Dublin, 2003), 138.
18 F. Kelly, Early Irish farming (Dublin, 2000), 89-90.
19 I am grateful to Katharine Simms for pointing this out.
21 L. McKenna (ed.), The Book of Magnusun: Leabhar Mèig Shamhradháin (Dublin, 1947), 59 [VII: 7]
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On the first edition *Ord-* o former landholdings of *horse park’* and ‘race ed earlier learned family *Ui Chobhthaigh poets at dísease, southwest of the landscape includes areas of the Meic an Ghabhann Silvermines, ‘race park’ is land of Cooleen, which is island. Racing activity in with an *óenach* or tribal *race course’ or *race oval assembly site may also limpest on learned family age of place-names in the core patrimonial land of

the Uí Cheinnselaigh on the Wexford–Wicklow border. The site of the inauguration place of the Uí Cheinnselaigh is Loggan Lower townland, southwest of which is Pallis where the Meic Eochadha poets were located.20 They were the hereditary inaugurators of the Uí Cheinnselaigh and their role is encapsulated in the assembly site name, Leac Mhic Eochadha, as recorded by Keating.21 West of Pallis and southwest of Loggan Lower there is a group of townlands around Buckstown House demesne that are named: Knocknagapple, Racecourse, Deerpark. These, together with the assembly site, the *pálls* celebrated in the townlands of that name and the presence of the landholding of the poet-inaugurator, point to this being the location of the dynastic centre of the Uí Cheinnselaigh.

Just as a sept name was incorporated into the place-name of a learned family landholding, the profession ascribed to a family was also sometimes used in conjunction with a land denomination term. *Ceart Uí Néill*, which was compiled in the late fifteenth or sixteenth century but obviously refers to earlier rather than to contemporary circumstances, cites Fearann an Reacaire, ‘the Reciter’s land’, as the holding of the Mac Con Midhe *ollamh* in poetry to the Uí Néill of Tir Eoghan—‘On the night that he is in Ard Sraitha his table is supplied by Mac Conmidhe from Loch Í Mhaoldubháin, the Reciter’s land’—in Sliocht Airt Uí Néill.22 The respective representatives of the Mic Con Midhe in poetry regarded this land, central to which was Loch Í Mhaoldubháin, as integral to their hereditary office, but it was forfeited in 1435 because the *ollamh* offended Ó Néill.23

During the sixteenth century the term ‘rhymer’ was commonly used of poets by Tudor administrators and, unlike ‘reciter’, it was a pejorative term in that context. Sir William Herbert, having left Ireland in 1590, singled out the poets in his writings about the state of Ireland as a particular menace to good order in society:

...the repression of those evil triflers whom they call “poets” or “rhymer” and who excite the unstable minds of fierce men to rebellion and crime would be most useful for Ireland. And on that account the wisest and soundest laws have been passed to stifle and banish these Sirens.24

‘Rhymer’ is also occasionally seen on Tudor maps, where cartographers used it to designate the landholdings of particular poetic families. When the

lands of the Uí Dhálaigh poets of Muinter Bháire, which is synonymous with Sheepshead peninsula and Kilkrohane medieval parish in West Carbery, Co. Cork, were mapped by Francis Jobson as part of a map of the province of Munster commissioned by Lord Burleigh in 1589, he referred to the entire peninsula as 'Rymers', thereby identifying it as the land of the Uí Dhálaigh. The circumstance in which the Uí Dhálaigh came to settle on the Sheepshead peninsula, from the patrimonial lands of their sept in the midland kingdom of Teathbha, is not entirely clear, but it has been convincingly argued by O'Sullivan that it was probably the Anglo-Norman Carew family, sometime allies of the Meic Carthaigh, who settled the Uí Dhálaigh onto the Muinter Bháire lands of the Sheepshead peninsula during the late twelfth century. This claim was made c. 1618 by Tadhg Ó Dálaigh, ollamh and head of the senior Uí Dhálaigh line of Muinter Bháire, in his poem Gabh mo ghearr an a Sheóirse ('Heed, O George, my complaint'), addressed to Sir George Carew. Tadhg wrote:

\[ Rinn cheana do chinn fhine
mar faidh cenn ar geiridhe; 
déantar lat iaise oram
glac an nair-se a uraghall. \]

'The head of our poetic family once got a promontory from the head of your family; deal generously, as I advise, receive now my complaint about it.'

By all measures 36 ploughlands, 3 ploughlands of which were church land, was a sizeable land allocation to a learned family who were relative newcomers to Munster, but the quality of the land on Sheepshead peninsula must be taken into account. It is predominantly marginal upland, with most settlement forced onto the southern strip of coastline overlooking Dunmanus Bay.

Mac Cana in his influential paper on 'The rise of the later schools of filidheacht' clarified why some of the later schools came to be where they are, based on an earlier suggestion by Flower. The class of later hereditary literary families arose from the hereditary ecclesiastical families who maintained possession of monastic termonland as comharbhaí and airchinnigh long after the monastic schools had broken up. In other words, many of the later medieval learned families were synonymous with hereditary...

28 TCD MS 1209, no. 36.
29 A.I 1198.5. 
31 Lambeth Palace MS. 605, fol. 239; O'Sullivan, 'Tadhg O'Daly', 27, 34, 37; J. O'Donovan, The tribes of Ireland: a satire by Aenghus O'Daly (Dublin, 1852), 4, 10. 
32 J.S. Brewer and W. Bullen (eds), Calendar of the Carew Papers 1589–1600 (London, 1869), 352. 
EARNED FAMILIES

háire, which is synonymous with medieval parish in West Jobson as part of a map of Lord Burleigh in 1589, he thereby identifying it as the which the Uí Dhálaigh came to control lands of their not entirely clear, but it has been the Anglo-Meic Carthaigh, who settled in lands of the Sheephead. This claim was made c. 1618 by senior Uí Dhálaigh line of terán a Sheóirse (‘Heed, O'Corrie Carew. Tadhg wrote:

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FIG. 2.—The cultural landscape of Loch Mór Máothla showing the lands of the Ó Dubhghaillán comharba of Cill Rónáin and ollamh in senchas to the Mac Diarmada of Magh Luirg. (Drawing by Rory Sherlock based on Ordnance Survey 6-inch map, sheet 4, Co. Roscommon.)

30 AClón 1398.
who died in 1578 is described as ‘a learned historian, who kept a thronged house of general hospitality’. Lasair, the saint to whom Ó Dubhghaileannáin was comharba, was allegedly the daughter of Rónán, who gives his name to the medieval parish and church of Cill Rónán. The cult of St Lasair was maintained by the comharba and a Life of Lasair was compiled by David Ó Dubhghaileannáin in 1670. Indications of the more pragmatic role of the Ó Dubhghaileannáin ollamh and comharba, as a biatch, are found on the landscape and in the chronicles. An entry noting the death in very old age of the ollamh in his own house at Cill Rónán in 1488 refers to him as ‘the richest of the literati of Ireland in flocks and herds’. The Cill Rónán landscape is a mix of dry and wet meadow, upland, woodland and lake—a perfect combination of resources to support livestock (see Fig. 2). The keeping of one form of livestock or other was not exclusive, because various kinds of livestock could be grazed together. Above the church there is a level area where the wall-footings of two stone buildings lie, and north of these the land falls away before climbing again to Kilronan Mountain. In this area between the stone platforms and the foot of the mountain a large tract of lush, wet grassland, which is divided into a series of long fields by the remains of relict field walls constructed of very large boulders. Two townland names west of this level tract of land are Stonepark and Catron na gcloch (= Ceathramhain na gCloch), signifying rocky pasture. Noteworthy too is the townland named Curraghnabole that adjoins Stonepark further upland and indicates a booley site, either for milking or for seasonal movement of livestock. A small area of pre-modern ridge and furrow is also visible on the landscape at the northern end of Church Acres townland on the hill-slope crowned by Carraig Aodháin and northwest of the relict field boundaries (Fig. 2).

Service families to the households of Gaelic lords were situated on the mensal lands of the lordships. The following extract from Sir John Davies's tract on the ‘Lawes of Irelannde’ (1609) explains that the lucht tighe or mensal lands of a lordship were inhabited by these providers, among whom were the particular branches of the secular learned families that served the Gaelic court:

The chief had certain lands in demesne which were called his loughty [lucht tighe], or mensal lands wherein he placed his principal officers, namely his Brehons, his marshal, his cupbearer, his Physician, his surgeon, his Chronicler, his Rhymers, and others, which offices and possessions were hereditary and peculiar to certain septs and families...

26 AFM 1578.
28 AFM 1488.
istorian, who kept a thronged to whom Ó Duibhgeannáin Rónán, who gives his name to án. The cult of St Lasair was sair was compiled by David Ó more pragmatic role of the Ó a biatach, are found on the sting the death in very old age n in 1488 refers to him as ‘the nd herds’ 39. The Cill Rónán upland, woodland and lake—a rt livestock (see Fig. 2). The r was not exclusive, because 1 together. Above the church of two stone buildings lie, and e climbing again to Kilronan platforms and the foot of the rassland, which is divided into a field walls constructed of very of this level tract of land are ramhain na gCloch), signifying nd named Curraghanaboley that icate a booley site, either for ck. A small area of pre-modern udscape at the northern end of owned by Carraig Aodháin and ig. 2). celtic lords were situated on the g extract from Sir John Davies’s ists that the lucht tighe or mensal providers, among whom were the families that served the Gaelic ne which were called his loughty he placed his principal officers, is cupbearer, his Physician, his ; and others, which offices and peculiar to certain septs and

In return for his professional services, an ollamh of a learned family on mensal land was immune from paying cios or tribute, which was generally an annual payment, 40 but as an inhabitant of the lucht tighe he was obliged to provide food and other resources for the chief’s household. This obligation to resource the household on a regular basis predicates significant land-based activity on learned family mensal landholdings. While much of that activity appears to have been focused on tillage (especially oats) and livestock rearing, particularly cattle, sheep and pigs, there is evidence that deer were present too and that horses were kept for ploughing and for riding. A record taken in 1608 of the property of Tadhg Ó Cianáin, chronicler to the Méig Uidhir of Fir Mhanach, observed that he had owned, and by then had forfeited, 15 cows, 8 calves, 1 garran (workhorse), 1 hackney (riding-horse) and 25 swine. 41 In the circumstances of the Nine Years’ War and its aftermath, this record may reflect Ó Cianáin’s livestock at a significantly reduced level.

Landholdings of learned families in the lucht tighe are sometimes revealed inquisitions. An inquisition of the Court of Exchequer (1585) concerning the lordship of West Clann Chuiléin in south Co. Clare, records that the holding of the Ó híceadhá physicians at Ballyhickey consisted of one-and-a-half quarters of mensal land. 42 The following reading of the lands of the Ó híceadhá ollamh in medicine captures various elements of his local world. The physician to a chief resided, for obvious reasons, close to the chiefs castle and usually within the lucht tighe, a juxtaposition which is seen, for instance, in the location of the lands of the Ó híceadhá physicians to Daingean Ui Bhigín castle, the principal seat of the Mac Connara Fionn of the lordship of West Clann Chuiléin. Ó híceadhá was also hereditary physician to the Ó Briain overlord of Thomond. The name of their holding survives in the townland of Ballyhickey, which is 385 acres of mostly rough rocky pasture and underwood north of the village of Quin, in the parish of Clooney, Co. Clare. The townland of Drim which adjoins it on its west side was also part of the former Ballyhickey denomination and is characterised by 217 acres of rocky pasture with a turlough or seasonal lake in the south of the townland. 43 Ballyhickey is adjoined on its northwest side by Moyriesk, which, as a later demesne landscape, contained a deer park that abuts the townlands of Drim and Ballyhickey and which is noted on the first edition Ordnance Survey map (1842).

Although the deer park place-name is clearly associated with the nineteenth-century Moyriesk House of the Vesey Fitzgerald family, 44 there

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40 C.W. Russell and J.P. Prendergast (eds), *Calendar of the State Papers relating to Ireland of the reign of James I, 1608–10* (London, 1874), 537, 543.
43 Prior to that the Moyriesk lands had been Macnamara property from the late seventeenth century.
is a correspondence between later demesne deer parks and learned family lands, as already observed in relation to Mac Aodhagán of Ballymackegan. Typically, deer require a varied environment, including open grassland, wood or tracts of wild, semi-wooded country, and consistent and accessible watering places. The undulating topography of rocky pasture, combined with a permanent pond, a seasonal lake and areas of blackthorns, young wood and scrub land at Ballyhickey would have been ideal conditions for deer and for grazing other livestock. Of course, the keeping of one form of livestock or other would not have been exclusive; as already stated, various kinds of livestock could be grazed together. The keeping of livestock was clearly an important activity on learned family holdings. Apart from the foods obtained from these animals, it must be considered that the scribal activities of learned family schools created a demand for a regular supply of parchment, which would have been obtained from the membrane of cattle (not necessarily vellum or calf-skin), sheep, goat and possibly even from deer. On such parchment, medical texts, poetry and the genealogies, histories, law and lore of Gaelic civilisation were copied down by the schools.

Park townland names and park field and monument names, as recorded by the first Ordnance Survey of the nineteenth century, are very common on, and in the vicinity of, former learned family landholdings. For instance, there is Parke townland on the Mac Fhirbhísigh landholding at Lackan in Tír Feachrach; ‘Park fort’ in Creevy townland between the lands of the Mac an Bhaird poets and Ó Cléirigh historians in Tír Conaill; and ‘Parkmore Fort’ at Finavarra where the Ó Dálaigh poets in the lordship of Boireann kept a guest-house and school. That the term pàirc had meaning in a Gaelic context before the intensive emparkment that occurred with English-style demesnes in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, is confirmed by its use in native sources. Between 1565 and 1570 Domhnall Ó Dubh dhá Bhoireann and his Burren school were frequently based in the Mac Aodhagáin school at Páirc in the McDaid-Burke lordship of Clann Conmaigh, in order to copy material for Domhnall’s legal glossary (British Library, London Ms Egerton 88, Royal Library, Copenhagen Ms NKS 261 b 4º, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin Ms 23 Q 6; pp 33–52). In that manuscript several of the scribes note their location as ‘in the Park’:

_Mei est incipere Dei est infinire i. do Domnall ó Dhuibh dhá boirenn in aidchi iar féil Brij[gh]de 1569. ar in pâire aít._

‘Mine it is to begin and God’s to finish. [written] for Donall O’Davoren the night following S. Bridget’s Festival 1569. I am at Park.’

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deer parks and learned family Aodhagáin of Ballymackegan, ncluding open grassland, wood ing consistent and accessible / of rocky pasture, combined d areas of blackthorns, young have been ideal conditions for se, the keeping of one form of as, as already stated, various The keeping of livestock was nilly holdings. Apart from the be considered that the scribal demand for a regular supply of f from the membrane of cattle, goat and possibly even from y and the genealogies, histories, ed down by the schools. monument names, as recorded h century, are very common on, and holdings. For instance, there landholding at Lackan in Tír between the lands of the Mac an Conaill; and ‘Parkmore Fort’ at e lordship of Boireann kept a ad meaning in a Gaelic context ed with English-style demesnes s confirmed by its use in native Ó Dubh dhá Bhoireann and his Mac Aodhagáin school at Páirc Connaigh, in order to copy sh Library, London Ms Egerton 361 b 4°, Royal Irish Academy, iscript several of the scribes note omnall ó Duibh dhá boirenn in ire aí.

[written] for Donnell O'Davoren l 1569. I am at Park.46

Duibhdhboireann, provenance and the British Museum (London, 1926), 108.

Still more interesting is the repeated use of deer imagery, sketched in ink in a naïve style within the bottom margins of some framed folios of the manuscript, which, O’Sullivan suggests, were variously executed in 1565, 1566 and 1567.47 The stags, hinds and hunting dogs featured may reflect the real presence of deer and hunting grounds on the pasture and bogland that constituted most of the Mac Aodhagáin landholding at Páirc.

Aside from livestock, the availability of mineral deposits on learned family holdings and the extent, if any, to which they might have engaged as craftsmen with those resources, is a consideration that requires greater field research. On the western side of Ballyhickey townland, close to the boundary with Molyreisk, a silver and lead mine operated in the nineteenth century and Kilbreckan silver mine is situated in Monanoe, close to the boundary with Drim townland. Whether the silver deposits in this area were exploited during the later medieval period by the Uí Íceada is as yet unknown, but it is worth recalling that the landholding of Mac an Ghabhann, who was traditional historian to the Uí Chinnéidigh of Urmhumhá Íochtarach, is centred on the silver mines that give their name to the later town of Silvermines, Co. Tipperary, and that the landholding of the Clare branch of that sept, at Coskean in the lordship of Boireann, is flanked to the west by Ailwee Mountain where deposits of lead and silver were mined in the nineteenth century. On the Muinter Bháire lands of the Uí Dhálaigh there are deposits of copper in Gortavillig and silver in Killoveenoge, appropriately overlooked by ‘Seefin’ (Suidhe Fhinn; Fig. 3), the highest point of the Sheepshead peninsula. ‘Knockseefin’ in Lackanascarry townland overlooks Pallas Green village and Pallashill—an area of significant zinc-lead mineralisation48 in Co. Limerick—where a branch of the Mógh Cairth poets of Garrison resided in the sixteenth century.49

Such relationships between learned family lands and mineral enrichment may reflect the earlier situation of ceard (craftsmen) on royal demesne lands. Although the term gabha in the name Mac an Ghabhann means blacksmith and strictly speaking relates to iron-working, metal-working in silver is a craft and therefore pertains to the ollamh ceard. Members of medical family schools often stepped outside of their profession to act as scribes in the compilation of material from history, law and poetry in other schools.49 The extension of that dexterity to include silver-smithing, in the case of the Uí Íceada or a member of their household on the lucht tighe lands of West Clann Chuiléin, is not implausible, but if an association between learned families and high-quality metallurgy can be made, that connection in the case of the Uí Íceada may be historical rather than actual by the late medieval period and may refer to the exploitation of mineral

resources for fine metalwork on the early medieval Dáil gCais royal demesne of Tuath Mhaige Adhair where their later landholding was located. In an early medieval context, Nagy has referred to the portrayal of Finn in myth, and specifically in Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne, as leech or healer in addition to poet and smith. The learned classes may have cultivated and projected themselves in the Fenian tradition, as polymaths and possessors of ‘the esoteric and supernatural knowledge common to craftsmen’.31

**Natural and Antique Landscape**

It can be argued that there were factors, other than economic resources, such as natural beauty and wilderness and proximity to antiquities, taken into consideration in the allocation of landholdings to learned families, especially for poets and traditional historians. Simms has noted that the poets had an appreciation of natural beauty and ‘considered an extensive view of the countryside as an aesthetic delight’.32 It is hardly coincidence that schools of *senchas* and poetry tend to be located in areas of great natural beauty and wilderness. Lying between Bantry Bay and Dunmanus Bay, the setting of the school and residence of the Úi Dháláigh poets at Dromnea and Farranmanagh, on the Sheepshead peninsula in Co. Cork,

32 Simms, ‘References to landscape and economy’, 146.
lieval Dál gCais royal demesne andholding was located. In an
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**LANDSCAPE**

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**Fig. 4**—View over Loch Mór Máothla from the medieval parish church of Gille Rónáin (photo: E. FitzPatrick).

affords an outstanding view to the Beara peninsula. The location of the Uí Dhuibhgeannáin settlement on a terraced hillside below Kilronan mountain, overlooking Loch Mór Máothla, is nature's beautiful composition (Fig. 4), while the landscape setting of the Uí Chléirigh landholding at Kilbarron on the edge of the Atlantic overlooking Donegal Bay, with a view northwest to the cliffs of Slieve League, is dramatically liminal (Fig. 5).

The sequestered hillside and coastal settings of these landholdings also convey a sense of exile or retreat from the world, although they were integral to a highly organised and complex lordship territorial matrix. In literary tradition, the poet (fíl) and member of a warrior band (fénnid) are primary in the mythological character of Fionn mac Cumhallo who, as the poet-exile, finds special knowledge in the wilderness. Thomas O'Sullivan's eighteenth-century description of a bardic school in the introduction

**Fig. 5**—The tower house settlement of the Uí Chléirigh situated on a promontory overlooking the Atlantic, at Kilbarron, Co. Donegal (photo: E. FitzPatrick).

53 Nagy. The wisdom of the outlaw, 17.
to Carte’s Life of the Duke of Ormond, supports a view of the bardic schools as sequestered institutions. McManus has explained that in respect of the educational routine and conditions of a bardic school ‘much of O’Sullevane’s account is supported by the evidence of poetry’. O’Sullevane comments that ‘it was likewise necessary the place should be in the solitary recess of a garden, or within a sept or inclosure, far out of reach of any noise, which an intercourse of people might otherwise occasion’. His view of the ideal location of a bardic school should be treated with some credibility, not least because the landscape setting of schools of senchas and poetry, in particular, tend to support that opinion.

When a learned family received a parcel of land, it was not a green-field site but generally a place that already carried the marks of settlement, and some of it of considerable antiquity. Prehistoric landscapes and especially megalithic tombs are often found on the landholdings of schools of senchas and poetry. Around Loch Mór Máothla there are several court tombs and a large tumulus. Within 50m of a rath and just north of the schoolhouse of the Uí Dhálaigh of Dromnea on the Sheephead peninsula there was a monumental stone row, unfortunately cleared during land improvements. Are such occurrences merely coincidental or is it the case that the obsession of the hereditary learned classes with the past was not just confined to the written word but to antiquities in their immediate environments? The juxtaposition of some learned family holdings to the assembly sites of Gaelic lordships can, of course, be explained by the fact that quite often assembly places and service family holdings were situated on the lucht tighe. The landholding of the Ó hÍceadha physician to Ó Briain and to MacConmara Fionn, at Ballyhickey and Drim, was a parcel of antique cultural landscape containing within its bounds two prehistoric megalithic tombs, a standing stone and a stone row, a mound, a large hilltop enclosure and a holy well dedicated to St Seánán. More pertinent, the inauguration mound of Magh Adhair and its complex of monuments, where the Uí Bhriain and their Dál gCais ancestors were inaugurated, lie just east of Ballyhickey. Likewise, the lands of the Mac Eochadha poets and inaugurators of the Uí Cheinnsealaigh at Pallis in Co. Wexford are focused in the area of the assembly site of the sept at Loggan Lower. Demonstrating that this phenomenon is more widespread, Lios na Ríogh, the assembly place of the Magennis of Iveyagh, is found on the lands of the Ó Ruanadhha poets at Lisnacroppan, just southwest of the auspiciously named Seafin [Suidhe Fhinn] in Ballyroney parish, Co. Down.

55 Memoirs of the Right Honourable the Marquis of Clanricarde, Lord Deputy General of Ireland... With a digression containing several curious observations concerning the antiquities of Ireland (Dublin, 1744), 107–8.
57 E. Grogan, The north Munster project, vol. 1: the later prehistoric landscape of south-east Clare. Discovery Programme Monograph No. 6 (Bray, 2005), 79–85.
The access that these families had to expansive cult landscapes on mensal lands suggests that they interacted with them especially where they had a hereditary official role in the inauguration ceremony of successive lords of a dynasty at an assembly site of long standing. Their stewardship of the past appears not to have been confined to reproducing it in books, but to active involvement with antiquities on their lands. Families who practised *senchas* and poetry for the Gaelic court were placed on mensal landholdings that incorporated significant antique landscapes. Those lands originally formed part of early medieval royal demesnes. That learned families were also involved in active remembrance of place-names, and possibly even naming or re-naming topographical features and monuments, is indicated by a colophon in the fifteenth-century manuscript known as the Book of Pottlerath, which was compiled by, among others, scribes of the Mac Aodhagáin and Ó Cléirigh families, and which forms part of the Saltair of Edmund mac Richard Butler, who was the cousin of the Butler Earl of Ormond. A scribe notes the place of writing and the historical name of that place:

Today is the Saturday after Christmas and we are in Pottlerath after writing all that we found collected in the Psalter of Cashel and much from the Book of Rathán and from the Book of the Prebend (Cong). And all the new writing in this book was written for Edmund son of Richard in the Fort of Óengus mac Nad Froich which is now called Pottlerath... 

**RESIDENCES AND SCHOOLS**

Since groups of kin-based learned families and their schools constituted networks of knowledge exchange, some of which extended to Gaelic Scotland, especially during the sixteenth century, ideas must have been traded not just about manuscripts, but also about the buildings in which they were produced and housed, and more generally about the infrastructure and physical environment of the often substantial landholdings in which learned families lived, worked and farmed. During the fifteenth century, and certainly by the end of the sixteenth century, those who carried the title of *ollamh* generally resided in tower houses, but not exclusively so, as some remained associated with *crannóg* or *inís* settlements, with the *ráth* and *caiséal*, and with the *pailís* that is mostly identifiable as a moated site. This settlement picture is quite nuanced. It is the result of a complex process, both of the continued use and modification of historic settlements (some of which had early medieval royal associations and occur on the core lands of ruling families) and a...
desire for the highly visible tower house in response to status and particular needs.

For the ollamh who was also a guest-house keeper, the tower house was perhaps attractive as a residence because it offered the possibility of more defined and controlled use of space, with the separation of guesting and feasting areas from private chambers. One of the most dramatically appointed tower-house residences of a learned family is situated on a promontory at Kilbarron in southwest Donegal which the Uí Chléirigh inherited from their predecessors, the Uí Scingin, with whom they had intermarried (Fig. 5). The promontory, which is likely to have a pre-tower house origin and was perhaps in part chosen for that reason, is walled and gated, and within it there is a small tower house and at least two additional buildings, one of which is possibly a hall for guesting and feasting. The chronicles are rich in references to the hospitality of the Uí Chléirigh in the late fifteenth and sixteenth century. Tadhg Cam Ó Cléirigh who died in 1492 is described as ‘ollamh to O Domnaill in literature, poetry and history, a man who had kept a house of general hospitality for the mighty and needy’, and his grandson who died in 1556 is lauded as the keeper of ‘a house of hospitality for the learned, the exiled and the literary men of neighbouring territories’. The gated and defensive aspect of tower houses might imply that the precious libraries of these families, many built up over generations of scholarship, were located at the residence of the ollamh. Some libraries were clearly large and significant. The library of the Ó Maoil Chonaire school of senchas was apparently so large that Flann Mac Aodhagáin claimed in 1636 ‘...numerous the unknown number of ancient and modern books which I saw written and being transcribed’. Libraries in tower houses were probably housed in large chests and in wall presses.

Inis and crannóg settlements are associated with several learned families, especially those who were keepers of the arts of poetry and senchas. Loch Í Mhaoldubháin, which was central to the landholding of the Mac Con Midhe in Sliocht Airt Uí Néill, is the most northerly of a chain of three lakes named Lough Catherine, Lough Fanny and Lough Mary on the demesne of Baronscourt, southeast of Ard Sratha (Ardstraw). It has been suggested that Loch Í Mhaoldubháin is Lough Catherine, the largest of the three lakes. It covers c. 91 acres and is distinguished by a significant lake-island settlement called Island McHugh. It is also thought that Lough Catherine is identifiable as Loch Laoghaire, which is recorded several times in the chronicles and also features in a poem by Giolla Brighde Mac

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60 Simms, ‘Bardic Schools’, 36.
61 APFM 1492; AConn 1492.7.
62 APFM 1556.
Con Midhe, Hogan in his *Onomasticon* suggested that Loch Laoghaire was Lough Mary, the smallest and most southerly of the Baronscourt lakes, but the lack of any settlement on or near that lake makes that identification unlikely. Moreover, the presence of a large oval enclosure, variously called Lis Laoghaire (Lislear) and Dún Laoghaire, situated 40m from the northern shoreline of Lough Catherine, seems to corroborate the association of the historically recorded place-name Loch Laoghaire with Lough Catherine. Both Loch Í Mhaoldubháin and Loch Laoghaire appear, then, to be alternative names for Lough Catherine.

Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe’s poem is a lament for Brian Ó Néill, referred to by the poet as ‘Brian Locha Laoghaire’, who died at the battle of Downpatrick in 1260. In 1325 Domhnall, the son of Brian Ó Néill, chief of Tir Eoghan, died at Loch Laoghaire. These references have been interpreted as evidence that the *inis* settlement of Island McHugh functioned ‘from the thirteenth century onwards as an important O’Neill residence and high status estate centre’. However, the direct connection made between the Mac Con Midhe *ollamh* and Loch Í Mhaoldubháin, in Ceart Úi Néill, suggests that Island McHugh was the residence of the *ollamh* in poetry to the Ó Néill and remained so until Mac Con Midhe was exiled from his lands in 1435. Archaeological excavation and scientific dating methods have revealed a complex settlement history at Island McHugh, with prehistoric occupation, a seventh-century construction date for the initial *cranmóg* palisade, followed by a period of abandonment until the thirteenth century when rebuilding on the *cranmóg* surface occurred. In the fifteenth century a tower house was constructed on the site and rebuilt in the sixteenth century. Dún Laoghaire, the large oval enclosure situated 40m from the northern shoreline of the lake, was also excavated by Ivans and Simpson, and while no medieval material was recovered from the site, they argued for an association between the enclosure and the *cranmóg*. Warner proposed that this prominent earthwork was the seat of the kings of Ul Fiachrach Arda Sratha and that Island McHugh was

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65 Williams, *The poems of Giolla Brighde*, 151 [XIII:52].
68 Williams, *The poems of Giolla Brighde*, 150, 309.
69 AFM 1325.1.
71 O. Davies, *Excavations at Island MacHugh* (Belfast, 1950); R. Ivans, D. Simpson and D. Brown, ‘Excavations at Island MacHugh 1985: interim report’, *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 49 (1986), 99–102. Davies’s excavations were conducted intermittently between 1937 and 1947, and the site was revisited by Ivans, Simpson and Brown 1985–6 in order to resolve issues arising from Davies’s excavations.
72 Ivans, Simpson and Brown, ‘Excavations at Island MacHugh’, 100.
perhaps their ‘bolt-hole’. The main point here is that the thirteenth-century occupation of the island settlement may be tied in with the emergence of the Meic Con Midhe as poets to the Úi Néill of Tír Eoghain, and that they may have continued to live there during the fourteenth and into the fifteenth century.

This finds some parallels in the association of other learned families with inis settlements. Cró-inis, or Cormorant Island on Lough Ennell, was the residence of the Ó Cobhthaigh poets in the midland territory of Machaire Úi Thighhearnáin. In 1446 the Ó Cobhthaigh ollamh and his two sons were murdered on the tiny island which accommodated their small tower house—

Donnall Ó Cobhthaig and his two sons were treacherously killed by Maelsechlainn son of the son of Art O Mailechlainn and by Feildlim son of the son of Fiacha Mag Eochacain on Crowinis in Loch Ennell, in his own house. He was a man of wide accomplishment and his house was an open guest-house.

The tower house was revealed during excavations by R.A.S. Macalister who misinterpreted the structure as a modern folly. No finds were recorded from that excavation. A more recent investigation of the island, also involving a small-scale dating programme, identified several routes running between the tower house and the lake shore and obtained ninth- and twelfth-century dates for the palisade of the crannóg. Just as the primary medieval occupation of Loch Laoghaire/Loch Í Mhaoldubhán, and very likely its onshore Dún Laoghaire, have royal associations, Cró-inis and the large onshore ráth called Dún na Scath which lies directly north of the island in the townland of Dysarts on the western shore of Lough Ennell, constituted a royal site of the Úi Néill high kings in the tenth and eleventh century. The death of the high king Maelsechnaill on Cró-inis is recorded for AD 1022—‘Maelseachlainn Mor, son of Domhnall, son of Donnchadh, pillar of the dignity and nobility of the west of the world, died on Croninis Locha-Aininn, after having been forty-three years in sovereignty over Ireland’. The Annals of Clonmacnoise provide the important detail that he died ‘in Croninis upon Logh Innill neere his house of Doone Sgiath’. Warner has also commented on this pairing of sites and surmised that the

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75 AConn 1446.2.
78 AFM 1022.2.
79 AClon 1022.
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1 on Cro-inis, Loch Ennell’, Proceedings

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island on which Máelseachnaíl died ‘seems to have been some sort of

adjunct, perhaps a secondary dwelling, a personal retreat’.81

Both of the islands discussed here suggest a pattern of poetic families

residing, from the high medieval period, on the crannóg settlements

associated with onshore early medieval royal sites, but the fact that in

the early medieval period these islands were places where sick kings

were tended or went to die, also suggests that their original role might be

more clearly defined than ‘bolt-holes’ or ‘personal retreats’. They could

have been bruaidhe (hostels) to the respective onshore royal residences,

and in particular they may have been monastic hostels run by churchmen

who held the hereditary offices of comharba and aircheannach. Cró-inis is,

after all, in the large townland of Dysart which, as the place-name suggests,

is distinguished by a monastic site. That obligations of the monastic hostel

included compassionate caring for the weary and sick traveller is

communicated in Columba’s instruction as to how to extend hospitality

to an exhausted crane:

‘You will...lift it tenderly, and carry it to the house near by; and having

taken it in as a guest there, you will wait upon it for three days and

three nights, and feed it with anxious care’.81

The role of the brughaidh, fear tighe aoidheadh, biatach or hospitalier

and the keeping of a teach aoidheadh or guest-house is, of course, one

that is common to the representatives of several learned families, and

especially those who were also hereditary churchmen. The 1446 chronicle

entry relating to the death of the Ó Cobhthaigh ollamh in poetry in his

own house on Cró-inis adds that ‘he was a man of wide accomplishment

and his house was an open guest-house’. This role also distinguished the

Ó Dubhghaemáin comharba of Cill Rónán. Paralleling the relationship

between Cró-inis as an early medieval island hospice or possibly a bruaiden,

and its later life as a learned family residence, an island variously called Inis

na Naomh and Inis Mór Máothla (see Fig. 2 above), located close to the

eastern shore of Loch Mór Máothla, features poignantly in the Life of St

Lasair as the place to which Lasair takes her sick father Rónán to die.82

This island is likely to have been the Ó Dubhghaemáin residence or

guest-house from the fourteenth century. Some of the timbers of the

crannóg platform remain in place.

In the Burren uplands of the Ó Lochlainn lordship, the Ó Dubh dá

Bhóireann ollamh’s residence, was a caiseal (Fig. 6) situated on his

landholding of Cathair Mhic Neachtain, at least until the late sixteenth

century when the Composition of Connacht (1585) records the ollamh,


82 A. and M.O. Andersen (eds and trans), Adomnán’s Life of Columba (Oxford, 1961),

87 i. 48.

Giolla na Naomh, living in the small tower house of Lissylisheen directly south of Cahermacnaghten townland. By 1601 the caiseal was the property of Aodh, the son of the ollamh, and by 1606 both Aodh and his brother Cosnamhach were sharing it, which was typical of the partible inheritance that characterised early modern Gaelic land holding. Although early medieval in origin, the caiseal was fashionably refurbished with a gate-house sometime in the late medieval period, and by 1606 the garth contained five buildings which are probably contemporary with the gate-house. The caiseal is generally regarded as the site of the Ó Dubh’s Bhoireann law school, but a building called Cabhail Tighe Breac in the southwest end of their landholding appears to have been a schoolhouse where pupils learned their arts. Archaeological survey and excavation have shown that Cabhail Tighe Breac is a single-storey building with the generous proportions of a medieval hall or church, initially partitioned at the west end and with a loft above. The gables contain four large keeping holes or wall presses which would be expected in a schoolhouse. The building was entered at the east end of the north wall through a moulded doorway more typical of a church and lit by seven windows of Tudor late gothic form, shuttered and not glazed. Dating evidence suggests that the building was first built and used c. 1500. Apart from fragments of window

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82 A.M. Freeman (ed.), 1936 The composition booke of Conought of 1585 (Dublin 1936), 7.
86 The principal aim of the excavations conducted in the southwest end of Cahermacnaghten townland in 2007, 2008 and 2010 was to test the hypothesis that Cabhail Tighe Breac was the late medieval sgoile anghaidh or schoolhouse. A total of four licences to excavate were held between 2007 and 2010 (07E0395, 08E435, 10E146 and 10E147).
the Ó Duibh ñe Bhoireann ollamh in law sixth century. The ollamh was living of the sixteenth century. The caiseal was in 1606 (photo: E. FitzPatrick).

The house of Lissylsheen directly By 1601 the caiseal was the h, and by 1606 both Aodh and which was typical of the partisan modern Gaelic land holding.85 seal was fashionably refurbished in the sixteenth period, and by 1606 the probably contemporary with the ded as the site of the Ó Duibh ñed Cabhail Tighe Brec in the ars to have been a schoolhouse s physiological survey and excavation87 a single-storey building with the c church, initially partitioned at ables contain four large keeping expected in a schoolhouse. The c north wall through a moulded by seven windows of Tudor late aching evidence suggests that the Apart from fragments of window

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and door forms which were essential to reconstructing a view of the building, the only small artefacts recovered from the primary period of use are a minute fragment of slate bearing a single inscribed character, and two iron objects – the top of a knife and possibly a pricker or a fork. While one piece of slate does not make a school, the architecture of the structure itself is important. It does not fall into any category of Irish rural domestic dwelling of c.1500 but has the character of a hall or church. The sequestered location of the building also suggests that it had a special purpose which required solitude and concealment.

Simms has noted that for the fourteenth century ‘we have evidence for fixed schools, each located at the home of a chief poet, using books in their studies’,88 but by the beginning of the sixteenth century, at least, the concept of a sgoilteach/teach na scoile,89 a schoolhouse devoted to the scribal and learning activity of Gaelic professional schools, had emerged, perhaps in response to a need for more specialisation of space and the separation of the business of learning and writing from the guesthouse, residence and library of the ollamh. Research to date suggests that it was a private institutional space in the style of a medieval hall or church, or a church combining use as a school, set apart from the learned family residence.

Moated sites are generally attributed to Anglo-Norman settlement, but the moated site in a Gaelic context is distinguished by the word pailis, which is variously translated as a stockade or fortified enclosure and more poetically as a palace.90 In bardic poetry the pailis as the setting for a significant timber house, has royal associations, the most renowned pailis being that of the Ó Conchobhair ‘king of Connacht’ at Cluain Fraoich in Machaire Connacht, celebrated in a fourteenth-century poem by Aonghus Ó Dálaigh;91 Kieran Ó Conchobhair has shown, through detailed fieldwork, that moated sites in Roscommon have Gaelic origins and use.92 However, the pailis has a greater distribution, reflected in townland names that incorporate the term, and it is frequently associated with learned families.

85 Simms, ‘Bardic schools, learned families’, 35.
86 Writing from the Mac Aodhagáin school at Park in the sixteenth century, one of Domhnall Ó Duibh ñe Bhoireann’s scribes, while working on Domhnall’s legal glossary, scribbled this marginal comment—Is tsa nac tic Gerallí do iar luiderim don sgoilteach uchaidh. ‘Gerald keeps on coming too often to the schoolhouse in quest of certain girls of mine’ (luiderim read as an anagram for der liam); O’Grady, Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts, 120. Risteard Ó Conchubhair while transcribing a copy of Liber pronoticorum recorded his place and circumstances of writing as—...a bhfhocair mo magaisg agus mo bhruair a teoch na scoil a nAchadh Mitch. Airi sin in 6. la do Mhartina agus dar mo uesthir sin iomhan orasc.1590’,...in the company of my master and kinsman [Donnchadh Óg Ó Conchubhair] in the schoolhouse in Aghnamacart on the 6th day of March. And upon my word, I am thirsty and hungry; 1590’, Nic Dhomhnaidh, ‘The medical school’, 13–14.
87 DTL s.v. pailis.
Fig. 7—A large moated site with a possible *pailis* or hall-type building on the platform and a D-shaped annexe outside the defenses at southwest, situated on the Mac Fhirbhisigh landholding at Lackan in Tír Fhíachraigh, Co. Sligo (plan: Paul Naessens).

Good examples of *pailis* survive on the Ballydoogan lands of the Ó Dubhgháin *ollamh in senchas* in the lordship of Uí Mhaine and on the landholding of Mac Fhirbhisigh of Lackan in Tír Fhíachraigh (Fig. 7). The townlands of Pullis Upper and Lower and Pallishill, in the Lagan of Leinster, constituted the landholding of the MacEochadha poets as recorded in the fiants for the late sixteenth century. A branch of the Ó Dálaigh poets was also resident there in the same period. There are two moated sites in Pullis Lower, one of which has a substantial platform, 36m by 35m, and an impressive bank with typically upturned corners and an external fosse. The larger of the two sites could have had its genesis as a *pailis* of the Uí Chinnsealaigh, and it may be the case that vacated lordly *pailis* situated on the patrimonial lands of a ruling family were re-used as the locations for later medieval learned family dwellings and schools.

**Conclusions**

The multiple and often indivisible roles performed by the learned classes in Gaelic society are best perceived by combining different kinds of evidence of their lifeways. Esoteric and practical, traditional and innovative, learned men were much more than mandarins. Understanding their
concerns and ways of life inevitably evokes the past. Place-names inscribe their landholdings with meaning, revealing topographical features, settlements, former hunting grounds, livestock parks and significant antique landscapes that were their professional inheritance. Learned family settlements were composite, and by the end of the late medieval period they incorporated the residence of the ollamh, often with a guest-house, a schoolhouse, agricultural features, possibly mines, prehistoric and early medieval antiquities, and, if the ollamh was also a comharba or an aircinneach, a church and a saintly cult site. A range of site types constituted the dwellings of this class, from traditional crannóg or inis, caiseal and pailis to the new architectural form of the tower house. This nuance in settlement forms can be attributed to complex processes of territorial continuity and settlement change and to the geography of their lands within the lordship. Many secular learned families, as service providers to the courts of Gaelic lords, were situated on mensal land of the lordships, which was inheritable land attached to the office of chief and which could not be redistributed. Therefore, they occupied or lay close to some of the most historically significant tracts of land that contained the signature sites of early medieval dynasties, such as royal dwellings and settlements, assembly sites, antique landscapes and natural resources such as woodland, designated hunting grounds and mineral deposits that may have been exploited for earlier metallurgy. Like other service families on mensal land, learned families had access to this heady, long-lived environment. On their own holdings and within the bounds of the lordships that they served, they may also have been active in naming and re-naming places with reference to mythological heroes and events. Thereby, they continued to layer the past into the present.

An important consequence of exploring learned family lifeways is the realisation that their landholdings are a portal through which earlier medieval royal demesne-lands and church lands can be reached, and from which the basis for parkland on many of the early modern country estates of Ireland can be better understood.

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1 LEARNED FAMILIES

Ballydoogan lands of the Ó hip of Uí Mhaine and on the n Tir Fhiachrach (Fig. 7). The nd Pallishill, in the Lagan of the MacEochadha poets as 1 century. A branch of the Ó e same period. There are two has a substantial platform, 36m cally upturned corners and an could have had its genesis as a be the case that vacated lordly a ruling family were re-used as nily dwellings and schools.

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2–100.
3 Wexford (Dublin, 1996), 107.