

## **Clerics and Clansmen: The Vicarages and Rectories of *Tradraighe* in the Fifteenth Century**

**LUKE McINERNEY**

The printed volumes of the documents known as the Papal Registers relating to Ireland for the period 1396-1521 are utilized to study the inner-working of ecclesiastical administration in Killaloe diocese during the fifteenth century. A case study is presented on a selection of parishes in, and adjacent to, the old deanery of *Tradraighe* with a particular focus on the Mac an Oirchinnigh (McInerney) of *Tradraighe*. The registers offer a valuable perspective on the role of vassal-septs at the parish level, as well as insight into the machinations of ecclesiastical administration in Gaelic dioceses.

Little is known of the inner-workings of either the Uí Bhriain kingdom of *Tuadh Mumhan* (Thomond) or the Mac Conmara lordship of *Clann Chuiléin* in east Clare.

The Mac an Oirchinnigh were a vassal-sept of the Mac Conmara *Fionn* clan whose patrimony was the territorial division of *Uí Caisín* which centered on the parish of Quin. The Papal Registers adds significantly to our understanding of administration in Killaloe diocese. This study, which focuses on Mac an Oirchinnigh clerics, provides evidence that the leading lineage of the sept were regarded as a noble second-order sept in the hierarchy of the Mac Conmara lordship. The surviving entries can yield useful hints to clan and kinship networks that formed a dominant feature of the political-economy of Gaelic lordships. The client-patronage networks that were at the core of Gaelic society until the submission of Murchadh Ó Bhriain to the crown 1543 can be studied, as can the presence of hereditary incumbencies of local septs in certain parishes.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Diocesan Economy of Killaloe**

Many of the churches of *Tradraighe* have ancient origins. It has been convincingly argued elsewhere that parish formation occurred only after the mid thirteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The original parish churches of Kilconry (c.500s), Clonloghan (c.900s), Tomfinlough

<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to acknowledge the insightful and detailed comments during the preparation of this article by Kenneth W. Nicholls, and the useful advice of Henry A. Jefferies, Brian Ó Dálaigh and Patrick Sunter.

<sup>2</sup> On parish formation see K.W. Nicholls, 'Rectory, Vicarage and Parish in the Western Irish Dioceses', *Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. 101 (1971) pp 53-84. Nicholls argues that parish formation west of the Shannon dates from after 1250, with Gaelic ecclesiastical sites before this time being based on the right of ecclesiastical patronage attached to lands independent of the existence of churches. In this pre-parish system church lands were administered by a *comharba* or *airchinneach*. Also see Patrick Nugent, *The Gaelic clans of Co. Clare and their territories 1100-1700 A.D* (Dublin, 2007) pp 120-8. Nugent argues that the impact of the Normans in parish formation only resulted in the parishes of Bunratty, Drumline, Clonloghan and Feenagh as creating a recognisable parish network. Parish formation in Gaelic regions probably began after granting parochial status to the territorial unit, the *tuath*, by the mid-thirteenth century, taking some time for the development to take root.

(c.500s)<sup>3</sup> and Kilnasoolagh<sup>4</sup> were of pre-tenth century origin and appear on the Killaloe diocesan taxation list of 1303/6.<sup>5</sup> The churches at Tomfinlough (an early monastic site) and Kilfinaghta were restored during the Norman period while the churches of Kilmurry-na-gall and Bunratty were constructed by the Normans.<sup>6</sup> The Irish church underwent much restructuring in the twelfth century, and in Clare an increase in church construction can be dated from the late twelfth century.<sup>7</sup> Churches located close to the Norman colony at Bunratty such as Clonloghan and Drumline must have featured as one of the ‘ten adjacent chapels’ recorded in the *Inquisition Post Mortem* of Thomas de Clare in c.1287 as connected to the Norman manor at Bunratty.<sup>8</sup>

If we take the region of *Tradraighe* as a case study of life in a fifteenth century Gaelic lordship, much can be gleaned from the Papal Registers. By studying the diocesan economy of Killaloe we can narrow down the specifics of how ecclesiastical institutions and local parish churches functioned and, in turn, their link to the clan system. The ‘deanery’ of *Tradraighe*<sup>9</sup> comprised land set aside for exclusive church use, such as the glebe lands of various church vicarages in *Tradraighe* as well as termon lands.<sup>10</sup> Glebe lands were set aside for clerics to draw an income from to support their household and were attached to the parish church. Termon lands, on the other hand, were more extensive and controlled by head tenants such as the hereditary ‘coarb’ and ‘erenagh’<sup>11</sup> who paid a chief rent to the Bishop of Killaloe and were required to provide the bishop’s retinue with ‘noxials’ and entertainment at specific times of year.<sup>12</sup> The

<sup>3</sup> Gerrard Ryan, ‘Pre-Reformation Church and Monastic Sites in the Barony of Bunratty Lower: c500AD-1550AD’, *The Other Clare*, vol. 9 (1985), pp 44-50: 44-5.

<sup>4</sup> The earliest reference to Kilnasoolagh can be found in the Papal Registers for the year 1256 when the Bishop of Killaloe, Isaac Ua Cormacain (1253-1267), was granted a Papal Licence to empower him to receive the resignation of ‘Peter’, the perpetual vicar of ‘Kelluonasulech and Biratti’ [*sic* Bunratty] which together totalled less than 10 marks, and for the Bishop to enjoin a penance on the vicar and confer the vicarages onto Peter anew. W. H. Bliss (ed.), *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters Vol. I AD.1198-1304*, (London, 1893) p. 326.

<sup>5</sup> Dermot F. Gleeson, ‘The Diocese of Killaloe in the 13th Century’, *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, no. 4 (1939) pp 142-58 & 156-8.

<sup>6</sup> Ryan, ‘Pre-Reformation Sites in the Barony of Bunratty’, p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Sinéad Ní Ghabhláin, ‘Late twelfth-century church construction: evidence of parish formation?’ in Elizabeth Fitzpatrick & Raymond Gillespie (eds), *The Parish in Medieval and Early Modern Ireland: Community, Territory and Building* (Dublin, 2006) pp 147-67. Ní Ghabhláin argues that the surge in church building from the late twelfth century in Kilfenora diocese was connected to Irish church reform and posits that the increase in church construction could reflect the establishment of a parish system a century earlier than Nicholls’ suggestion that parish formation did not occur in the west of Ireland until after 1250, *ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>8</sup> On the *Inquisition Post Mortem* of Thomas de Clare see H.S. Sweetman (ed.), *Calendar of Documents Relating to Ireland: 1285-1292* (Liechtenstein, Kraus Reprint, 1974) pp 207-8.

<sup>9</sup> The 1622 Royal Visitation noted that Killaloe diocese was divided into seven deaneries. These deaneries in Clare included: ‘Omulled’ (*Uí mBlóid*), ‘O’Gassin’ (*Uí Caisín*), ‘Tradry’ (*Tradraighe*), ‘Drumcliffe’ and ‘Corkavaskin’ (*Corcu Baiscinn*). These deaneries were clearly based on the pre-Norman *triocha cét* territorial system. Dermot F. Gleeson, ‘The Coarbs of Killaloe Diocese’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, no. 79 (1949) pp 160-69:162. Also see John Rider, Protestant Bishop of Killaloe, in the 1615 Royal Visitation published in Michael Murphy, ‘The Royal Visitation, 1615: Diocese of Killaloe’, *Archivium Hibernicum*, vol. iii (1914) pp 210-19.

<sup>10</sup> The 1641 *Books of Survey and Distribution* show these glebe lands preserved in parishes in *Tradraighe*. For example, their sizes in Irish acres were: Kilnasoolagh (43a); Kilmaleery (56a), Kilconry (3a); Clonloghan (239a); Tomfinlough (3a & 2 roods); Kinfinaghta (110a.). See R.C. Simington (ed.), *Books of Survey and Distribution, Vol. 4, Clare* (Dublin, 1967), p. 154, p. 157, p. 161, p. 167, p. 169, p. 93. The large ‘glebe land’ recorded for Clonloghan was not just glebe land set aside to support the resident cleric of the church but was mensal land of the bishop as it is recorded ‘in ecclesiastical fee’ throughout the fifteenth century, see Nicholls, ‘Rectory, Vicarage and Parish’, pp 56-9 & p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> In Irish *comharba* and *airchinneach* respectively. See K. W. Nicholls, *Gaelic Ireland* (Dublin, 2003) p. 224.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

termon lands were a major source of revenue for the See of Killaloe and it was from these that bishops drew their income as these lands, referred to in the Papal Registers as 'in ecclesiastical fee', belonged to the cathedral chapter and were not under lay patronage.

In Killaloe diocese up to thirty monastic termon lands existed prior to the reformation which were controlled by local coarb and erenagh families.<sup>13</sup> Only in a few instances have the names of the original coarb families come down to us. Diocesan parishes of Killaloe that are recorded as having monastic termons attached include: Tuamgraney (coarbs: Uí Gráda); Iniscealtra (coarbs: Maol Ompile, Uí hÓgain and Uí h-Urthuile); Tulla (coarbs: Uí Cellaig); Killaloe (coarbs Uí h-Éindi or Uí Cormacáin); Kiltenanlea (coarbs unknown); Kildysert (coarbs unknown); Kilnaboy (coarbs: Uí Cuinn); Dysert O'Dea (coarbs: Uí Deagaid); Rathblathmaic (coarbs: Uí Ciaróg); Dromcliffe (coarbs: Uí Maoir); Doorra (coarbs unknown); Tomfinlough (coarbs unknown); Kilconry (coarbs unknown); Kyle (coarbs: Uí Duigin); Roscrea (coarbs: Uí Cuanáin); Youghalarra (coarbs: Uí hÓgain); Ardcroney (coarbs: Uí Forrgo whose chief family was Uí hÓgain); Lorrha (coarbs: Augustinian canons of Lorrha); Terryglass (coarbs unknown); Birr (coarbs unknown); Corbally, Roscrea (coarbs: Céili Dé of Monaincha, later the Augustinian canons); Lockeen (coarbs unknown); Kilruane (coarbs unknown); Kilcumín Éli (coarbs unknown); Kilcoleman (coarbs unknown); Kilkeary (coarbs unknown); Toomeveara (coarbs unknown); Disert Thene (coarbs unknown); Latteragh (coarbs unknown).<sup>14</sup>

From records written by offices acting for the English crown in the seventeenth century, we get a sense of the organisation of the Irish church at that later date, but which would have had resonance in the fifteenth century. According to a treatise ascribed to Sir John Oliver St. John, Lord Deputy of Ireland, but which probably drew from information by George Montgomery, the first Protestant Bishop of Derry, Raphoe and Clogher (1605-1610):

Every parishe for the most part, hath a parson, a vicar and an Heranaght [ie erenagh]. The church lands are possessed by the Herenaghers and thir septes according to the manner of Irishe tanurie... It is affirmed that the Herenaghers are in accompt [ie regarded] as Clergiemen, and do for the most part of them speake Lattin, and they say ancientlye they used to have primam tonsuraam, yet nevertheless they affirme that they allwayes used to marry [original spelling].<sup>15</sup>

In Gaelic regions the situation arose where parish churches were divided between a sinecure parson or rector who was in charge of the parish, and a vicar charged with

<sup>13</sup> Gleeson, 'The Coarbs of Killaloe Diocese', p. 169.

<sup>14</sup> Dermot F. Gleeson, *A History of the Diocese of Killaloe* (Dublin, 1962) pp 323-4. On the Uí Ciaróg of Rathblathmaic (ie Rath) see Tadhg Ó Donnchadha, *An Leabhar Muimhneach: Maraon Le Suim Aguisini* (Dublin, 1940) p. 311 and see the reference from c.1661 by Bishop Worth that 'Arthur O Connor brought to me Connor Kerroge, who says that he and his ancestors for many yeares were tents. to ye Bp for ye said 2/1 p and yt his ancestors wr clerkes to ye parish of Rath, & paid ye Bp 10sp annú, and to Bp Maloenie since ye wars'. See MS 1777, *Typescript copy of a survey of lands in the diocese of Killaloe made for Bishop Worth, 1661*, transcribed by (Rev) James B. Leslie, National Library of Ireland, 1936, p. 24. On the Maol Ompile (Uí Mhaolanfaidh), read the 1405 mandate relating to 'Baleincaysleay and Ara' (Castletown Arra) and Iniscealtra and its rector 'Cornelius Omlampaylls' in Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VI AD.1404-1415* (London, 1904) p. 33.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Henry A. Jefferies, 'Erenaghs in pre-plantation Ulster: an early seventeenth-century account', *Archivium Hibernicum*, vol. 53 (1999) pp 16-9:17.

priestly duties (ie. ‘cure of souls’). This situation existed in Gaelic areas as a compromise<sup>16</sup> as the patronage of rectories was generally in the hands of powerful Gaelic magnates who either built or endowed the rectory and maintained the upkeep of the rector and possessed the advowson. The arrangements for vicarages, however, were vested in the diocesan bishop – that is, the bishop collated a vicar and held the advowson under his ordinary authority. The coexistence of the rector and vicar had implications for the collection and division of tithes, and rectories referred to as ‘in lay fee’ and ‘in rural fee’ were usually under the lay patronage of ruling Gaelic families. The Papal Registers are animated with examples of rectors and vicars drawing income from tithes levied in their parishes. Added to this complexity was the existence of *erenagh* clans who functioned as chief tenants on episcopal land and whose office was transmitted hereditarily.

As mentioned, some parishes in Killaloe have their roots in the ancient monastic *termon* lands. In these cases the *coarb* (or *erenagh*) drew the entire parochial tithe, and made provision for the ‘cure of souls’ (eg. pastoral duties) through a vicar; his primary obligation was to pay a fixed sum to the bishop which financed the function of the cathedral chapter which, as a corporate body, was staffed by high-status ecclesiasts at the diocesan cathedral. The income from the *termon* lands was a substantial part of the episcopal income which, taken together with the income from the bishop’s visitation dues from religious houses and ‘noxials’ owed by *erenagh* clans, amounted to a substantial income. These various episcopal incomes made for a complex diocesan economy with its patchwork of benefices that supported parish and scholar-clerics, as well as financed the functions of the cathedral chapter at Killaloe.<sup>17</sup>

The role of the *coarb* and *erenagh* changed over the course of the middle ages and, in accordance with the arrangement made at Connacht in 1210, church lands were vested in the bishops and hence the *coarb* and *erenagh* became tenants to the bishop and farmed the *termon* lands.<sup>18</sup> The *coarb* families thereby lost some of their spiritual status as direct descendants of monastic founders, while the less prestigious ‘*erenagh*’ families became detached from monastic establishments that they had controlled but continued as quasi-ecclesiasts in minor orders, with many parishes drawing clergy from their ranks in the Gaelic regions of Ireland.<sup>19</sup>

*Tradraighe* consisted of the two rural rectories of Quin (‘Okassyn’ or *Uí Caisín*) and Bunratty (‘Tradry’ or *Tradraighe*).<sup>20</sup> These rectories had historical ties to the thirteenth century Norman colony and the patronage of the de Clare lords of Thomond.<sup>21</sup> The rural

<sup>16</sup> Nicholls, *Gaelic Ireland*, p. 118.

<sup>17</sup> Gleeson refers to this income as ‘Cathedratics’ (from the Latin *Cathedraticum*). Gleeson, *Diocese of Killaloe*, p. 296.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295. On the role of *erenaghs* and *coarbs* see Henry A Jefferies, *Priests and Prelates of Armagh in the Age of Reformations, 1518-1558* (Dublin, 1997) pp 125- 6. According to Jefferies, ‘the *erenagh* was the head of a clan holding church lands under a bishop. All male members of the clan were entitled to farm equal portions of the *erenagh*’s lands, but the *erenagh* was their representative.’ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>20</sup> A papal mandate of 1444 refers to ‘...the rectory of Burnnathi called Tradey...patron, Matthew Obyn, prince of Thomond’. This mandate mentions that the patron presented a canon from Limerick to the Bishop of Killaloe for institution, thus confirming that the *Uí Bhriain* kings possessed the advowson which was inherited by the Earls of Thomond, and later by their heirs, the Earls of Egremont. The *Uí Bhriain* kings ‘inherited’ the advowson of all the rectories of lay patronage in *Tradraighe* from the Normans, not the Mac Conmara. Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol.IX AD.1431-1447* (London, 1912) p. 438.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholls, ‘Rectory, Vicarage and Parish’, p. 59. Even after the Norman colony had been regained by the Irish after 1318, the right of presentation to the rectory of *Uí Caisín* lay with the king. This is probably because prior to 1322 the advowsons belonged to the de Clares, before the manor at Bunratty had been regained by the Irish. By the fifteenth century there is no mention of the king having the right of presentation to the rectory, presumably because the reality on the ground had changed and no vestige of royal authority at that later dated existed in Thomond. In 1339 we read in a

rectories covered a much larger area than parish vicarages and, in this case, comprised eight parishes.<sup>22</sup> Within their territory were located termon lands whose revenue was the possession of the cathedral at Killaloe.

The Papal Registers record two types of rectories. That is, those described as ‘in lay fee’ such as Quin and Bunratty which drew tithes from secular lands<sup>23</sup> and which the Uí Bhriain kings possessed the advowson.<sup>24</sup> The second type were rectories described as ‘in ecclesiastical fee’ and attached to the termon lands. In understanding the confusing arrangements that prevailed in Killaloe where a vicar and rector co-existed, it is useful to recall that prior to the fifteenth century it was decided that the priestly duties of a parish cleric - the ‘cure of souls’ - could not be adequately performed by a single vicar.<sup>25</sup> This meant that most parish churches were occupied by two incumbents - the vicar who at least nominally had the task of ‘cure of souls’, and the rector who was in charge of the parish or a religious house. In both cases, the tithe income was divided between the vicar and rector, with the rector receiving the greater share.<sup>26</sup> The situation is further complicated with the increased use of granting rectories as benefices<sup>27</sup> to support non-resident clerics who were engaged as officials at the diocesan see or as scholars, while maintaining a ‘working cleric’ or vicar in the parish to perform the actual duties of the cure.<sup>28</sup>

In summary, parishes provided two income streams for the church; one was the vicarial share of the tithe that went to support the vicar and his priestly activities, and the other was the rectorial share of the tithe that financed the rector and was raised from the secular lands.<sup>29</sup> Cathedral chapters received the tithes of the termon lands occupied by hereditary erenagh families. The cathedral chapter at Killaloe included a dean, an

royal patent, ‘*Joh’ ograd psentatr ad eccl’ de Ocassyn & Ocormak in epatu Laon*’ (John O’Grady presented the ecclesiastical benefices of *Uí Caisín* and *Uí Cormaic* in the bishopric of Laoinensis [ie Killaloe]). It would appear that the king’s presentation was done on the back of the recent exit of the de Clare’s from Clare, and is significant that it was to a Gaelic rather than a Norman cleric. A presentation in 1339 was to ‘Joh’ Omurthy’ to the benefice of *Kylfynatyn* (*sic* Kilfintanan), which was described as ‘*Thoe f’ & her’ Rici de Clare*’ indicating that the advowson of Kilfintanan was originally the hereditament of the de Clares, although references to Kilfintanan in the fifteenth century Papal Registers do not refer to the church as under lay patronage at that period. See Nicholls, ‘Rectory, Vicarage and Parish’, p. 60 and p. 78; E. Tresham (ed.), *Rotulorum patentium et clausorum Cancellariæ Hiberniæ*, Vol. I. Pars 1. Hen. II. Hen. VII., (Dublin, 1922) p. 26b. See, for example, references in the Papal Registers for the years 1427 and 1444-5 which describe Kilfintanan as a vicarage, collated to clerics under ordinary episcopal authority.

<sup>22</sup> The parishes of the rectory of *Tradraighe* included Bunratty, Clonloghan, Drumline, Feenagh, Kilconry, Kilmaleery, Kilnasoolagh, and Tomfinlough. The parishes of the rectory of *Uí Caisín* included Quin, Clooney, Doora, Inchicronan, Kilmurry-na-gall, Kilraghtis, Templemaley and Tulla.

<sup>23</sup> Regarding the secular lands of the rural rectories we read in a 1461 papal mandate ‘the rectory of rural lands called the rectory of Cunhy and Ocaissyn in the diocese of Killaloe with cure and of the patronage of laymen’. Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. XII AD.1458-1471* (London, 1933) p. 139.

<sup>24</sup> An advowson was the right of patronage of a church or ecclesiastical benefice such as the right to nominate a clergyman to such a church or other benefice. On a definition of advowson see the on-line *New Advent: Catholic Encyclopedia*.

<sup>25</sup> Nicholls, ‘Rectory, Vicarage and Parish’, p. 62.

<sup>26</sup> Nicholls states that in Killaloe diocese a third or a half of the share of the tithe from each townland in the parish went to the parish vicar, the rest going to the rector. In 1661 Bishop Worth wrote that two thirds of the tithes and spiritual duties of the rectory of Drumline were mensal (ie episcopal revenue). The other third presumably went to support the cleric at Drumline vicarage. See *ibid.*, p. 56 and MS 1777, ‘*survey of lands in the diocese of Killaloe*’ p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> A benefice was the right given permanently by the Church to a cleric to receive ecclesiastical revenues on account of the performance of some spiritual service. An appointee must prove to be of legitimate birth and good reputation – a precondition which many Gaelic clergy needed dispensation from given the propensity of clerics to have secular ‘wives’ or being the offspring of an ‘illegitimate union’. On the latter point see the 1429 mandate of Cornelius Macconmara, treasurer of Killaloe, for the perpetual vicarage of “Drumlygayll” (ie. Drumline). Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VII AD.1417-1431*, p. 236. On a definition of benefice see the on-line *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia*.

<sup>28</sup> Nicholls, ‘Rectory, Vicarage and Parish’, p. 54.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

archdeacon, a chancellor, a treasurer and a precentor all of whom relied on 'prebends' or tithe income set aside to support them. These prebends were sometimes created out of rectories and collated to an individual cleric and consisted of several benefices, but in these circumstances they were temporary and not part of the permanent economy of termon lands and rectorial tithes.<sup>30</sup> Rectories attached to the termon lands were distinct from those 'in lay fee' and 'in rural fee'<sup>31</sup> as they were not under lay patronage and instead were called 'in ecclesiastical fee' and were for the purpose of supporting the chapter at Killaloe. Such rectories sometimes provided a small income that supported a 'prebend' - the post of a canon in a cathedral chapter - as clerics who held an official post at the diocesan headquarters were not expected to support themselves but could draw revenue from 'prebends'.<sup>32</sup>

The chapter at Killaloe was supported by a portion of the rectorial tithes. The chapter was also supported by the awarding of prebends from ecclesiastical lands such as Clonloghan, which was described as 'the perpetual benefice without cure called the rectory in ecclesiastical fee'.<sup>33</sup> Clonloghan, for example, comprised of both a rectory and vicarage, highlighting the dual existence of a rector and a vicar which was commonplace in Gaelic dioceses in the latter middle ages.<sup>34</sup>

### The Role of Kinship and Clan

It is clear from the Papal Registers that the parochial system did not operate smoothly but was beset by competition among local septs over church patronage and the awarding of appointments. The control laymen exercised over church property and patronage contributed to the general impoverishment of the church in Gaelic regions. The jurisdiction of the church in Gaelic lordships - *ecclesia inter Hibernicos* - had little connection to Dublin or the crown; most appointments to important benefices were made by the papacy.<sup>35</sup>

In Ireland during the fifteenth century a steady stream of provisions to the Roman Curia petitioned the Pope for appointment to benefices.<sup>36</sup> Petitions tended to be in the form of an applicant who sought a benefice that for some reason had 'lapsed to the apostolic see' (on the death of previous holder) or on account of the benefice being occupied by a cleric accused of illegitimacy (being a son of a priest or of an illegitimate union between parents)<sup>37</sup> or a crime. Supported by the canon law doctrine that the pope was 'universal ordinary' and could override the authority of bishops in granting or

<sup>30</sup> Gleeson, *Diocese of Killaloe*, p. 297.

<sup>31</sup> The terms 'in lay fee', 'in rural fee' or 'of rural fee' were rectories which collected the tithes of the secular lands and were of the patronage of laymen - ie the Uí Bhriain kings who had the right of presentation to the bishop of clerics to be installed in these rectories. It is not surprising that this system (which had Norman origins) often resulted in the kindred of the lay patrons being awarded lucrative benefices and made these rectories ripe targets for lay usurpation. Nicholls, 'Rectory, Vicarage and Parish', pp 56-7.

<sup>32</sup> For example, in 1622 the chanter at Killaloe held a benefice called 'Clohinkelly' of Clonileah (ie parish of Kilseily) and this was a non-resident benefice to provide the chanter with an income. Nicholls, 'Rectory, Vicarage and Parish' p. 68.

<sup>33</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VII AD.1417-1431*, p. 490. See the reference for the year 1449-50 which relates to the removal of 'Dermot Macinnaerchynnyd' and the assignment of 'Matthew de Maccomara', rector of Bunratty, who held 'the rectory without cure of Clonlothan [*sic* Clonloghan]...which is called in ecclesiastical fee'. This description indicates that Clonloghan supported non-resident clerics, given the reference here to 'without cure'. Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. X AD.1447-1455* (London, 1915) p. 441.

<sup>34</sup> On the Clonloghan vicarage see the 1464 papal mandate which refers to the moveable goods being dilapidated and alienated from the 'vicarage'. Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. XII AD.1458-1471*, p. 410.

<sup>35</sup> Alan Ford, *The Protestant Reformation in Ireland, 1590-1641* (Dublin, 1997) p. 24.

<sup>36</sup> Nicholls, *Gaelic Ireland*, p. 119.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, the 1429 mandate of Cornelius Macconmara, treasurer of Killaloe, for the perpetual vicarage of 'Drumlygayll' (ie. Drumline). Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VIII AD.1427-1447* (London, 1909) p. 123.

collating benefices, many Irish petitions from the fifteenth century were brought forwarded by ‘delators’ who denounced clerics for illegitimacy and abrogating church law in order to secure the appointment themselves.

In this environment it was not uncommon for septs who monopolised local church benefices for successive generations to control the vicarial tithes, and resist the appointment of non-kin clerics which threatened their entrenched position. The picture is a cycle of appointment, removal and reinstatement textured with allegations of ‘simoniacal bargains’, intimidation and even bigamy, or so read a papal mandate of 1466.<sup>38</sup> We must be careful, however, when drawing conclusions from cases in the Papal Registers. The mandates were conditional and did not automatically take effect and caution would suggest that allegations were often false and motivated by competition for coveted benefices.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, aside from vague allegations of misconduct and the susceptibility of clergy to ‘concubinage’,<sup>40</sup> there existed a powerful incentive for lordly families to capture benefices and intrude their preferred clerics into benefices. Typically this involved launching proceedings against incumbent clergy through a suit at the Roman Curia - an expensive and drawn-out process - that only wealthy high-status clerics could finance.

Underneath the veneer of church appointments by officials were the kinship bonds of sept and clan. Kinship mattered and this was true of the clerics at the churches in *Tradraighe* where control of the vicarage and procurement of tithes must have been a strong motivation for ambitious men of local septs. In Killaloe the patronage of certain rectories by lay lords such as the Uí Bhriain was not always done for reasons of piety, but often out of self-interest by appointing kinfolk to positions of authority over church revenues. It was with reference to the clan system that many of these appointments and removals were transacted, and it was also with reference to the clan system that many appointments and awarding of profitable benefices were cynically exploited. Dermot F Gleeson noted that:

It is plain from the evidence of the papal registers for the latter part of the fifteenth century that diocesan government by ordinary jurisdiction and visitation had in fact broken down. Benefices were obtained openly by the practice of nepotism; even occasionally by violence and crime. Simony was rampant, and pluralities were commonplace. A clerk in minor orders...might hold valuable benefices in two or more dioceses at the same time. Many such holders of benefices never received major orders, and the cure of souls which should have gone with the grant of the benefices must have been grievously neglected, even when a vicar was appointed to perform these duties.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. XII AD.1458-1471*, p. 547.

<sup>39</sup> Jefferies points out that meaningful conclusions can only be drawn from specific allegations in the historical record as the generic claim that a cleric ‘detained’ a benefice unlawfully was often used as a pretext by the secular nobility and the higher clergy to impose their sons into senior positions in religious houses and parish vicarages. This method was also used by the sons of lesser clergymen to secure a benefice for themselves. The Roman Curia, because of the great distances involved, usually appointed three local judges to investigate the charges made against a cleric and to pass judgment. This system was open to abuse as it was practice for the cleric making the allegation to choose the judges. See Henry A Jefferies, ‘Papal Letters and Irish Clergy: Clogher Before the Reformation’, in Henry A Jefferies (ed.), *History of the Diocese of Clogher* (Dublin, 2005) pp 143-90.

<sup>40</sup> Henry A Jefferies, *Priests and Prelates of Armagh*, p. 79. Concubinage amongst Gaelic clergy took the form of secular ‘marriages’ as canon law forbade clerical marriage. Clerics in medieval Gaelic Ireland routinely ignored the canon law prohibition of married clergy, however this did not lead to a situation where the ‘wives’ of clergy or their daughters were of inferior social status. A papal mandate from 1322 cites William, archbishop of Cashel, who was reported to have fathered ‘fourteen spurious daughters, to whom he has given dowers, and has married them to rich and noble men’. Bliss, *Papal Letters Vol. II AD.1305-1342*, p. 228.

<sup>41</sup> Gleeson, *Diocese of Killaloe*, p. 444.

The bearer of ecclesiastical office amongst local septs must have played an important position in matters relating to their sept and parish at large, and it takes little imagination to realise that incumbency of a vicarage was highly sought after. If the history of the rectories and vicarages of *Tradraighe* is anything to go by, the clerics who controlled the churches were first and foremost clansmen of a local sept, and clerics representing church interests as a distinct second.

In terms of the condition of the clergy we find that many were described as ‘clerk’ probably indicating that they were received into minor orders and not ordained priests. Occasionally the mandates hint at the types of minor orders that various clerics held. Consider the 1427 mandate to ‘Cornelius Ogriffa’ and his assignment to Kilmaleery vicarage where he had been ‘promoted to the order of acolyte and to other minor orders, to minister therein and be promoted to all holy orders’.<sup>42</sup> Similarly we read in a mandate of 1496 that ‘Donatus Mathei Macnamara’ (Donnchadh mac Mathghamhain Mhic Conmara) was ‘first marked with clerical character by ordinary authority and subsequently dispensed by apostolic authority to be promoted to all orders and to hold a benefice even if it should have cure of souls’.<sup>43</sup> These mandates suggest that clerics were installed under the ordinary authority of the Bishop of Killaloe to perform pastoral functions and be collated to vicarages, but sought the ‘universal ordinary’ authority of the pope for promotion to higher orders.<sup>44</sup>

A survey of the Papal Register also shows that many of the allegations of simony (buying or selling ecclesiastical privileges)<sup>45</sup> and unlawful detainment of vicarages occurred amongst those clerics who held minor orders; minor clerics were more likely to have been driven by secular interests like kinship and patronage. At their level of education we can only guess in the majority of cases, although the mandates shed light on some individuals. In the year 1411 ‘Rory Olonyrgayn’ was assigned the vicarage of Kilnasoolagh and held the high-status post of official-general of the episcopal court of Killaloe. He was noted to have ‘studied canon law for about seven years in places where there is no university’.<sup>46</sup> Knowledge of canon and civil law was a necessity for career ecclesiasts based at the diocesan centre at St Flannans in Killaloe, despite the absence of a university in medieval Ireland.<sup>47</sup>

The control over appointments and the revenue that patronage brought was an enduring theme in the relationship between ecclesiastical administration and the Gaelic

<sup>42</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VII AD.1417-1431*, p. 510.

<sup>43</sup> Anne P. Fuller, *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters Vol. XVI Lateran Registers Part One: AD.1492-1498* (Dublin, 1986) p. 379.

<sup>44</sup> The Papal Registers record clerics receiving benefices on dubious grounds and concealed information, which resulted in conflicting mandates issued by the ordinary authority of bishops and the universal authority of the pope. Consider the example in 1422 when Cornelius Ogriffa of Kyllmaelyery (*sic* Kilmaleery) vicarage ‘had himself made a clerk by authority of the ordinary [ie the bishop] and, afterwards, without mentioning that he had been made a clerk and stating that he was the son of an unmarried man and an unmarried woman, received papal dispensation to be promoted to all other, even holy orders and hold a benefice even with cure, under pretext of which he has had himself promoted to the order of acolyte’. Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VII AD.1417-1431*, pp 236-7.

<sup>45</sup> Simony is defined as the deliberate intention of buying or selling such things as are spiritual, or such things that are annexed unto spirituals. An example of simony in the papal mandates occurs in 1413 in connection with the Rory Ocorbayn, a subdeacon of the diocese of Killaloe, where it was alleged that he was intruded into the vicarage of Quin by the unlawful collation by the dean of Kilmacduagh. The priest of Quin vicarage, Laurence Omelyer, had a ‘perpetual silence’ imposed on him and Rory, in order to ‘escape vexation’ from Laurence and his adherents ‘gave certain small presents to Laurence’. Rory was dispensed to hold the vicarage, notwithstanding the ‘fact of his having given the said presents to Laurence’. Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VI AD.1404-1415*, p. 367. On simony see the on-line *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia*.

<sup>46</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VI AD.1404-1415*, p. 256.

<sup>47</sup> Canon and civil law, the usual form of law in Western Europe, was studied together and made up the corpus of ‘Roman Law’. The study thereof is frequently referred to in the Papal Registers, with seven years often the length of study.

chieftains. The Papal Registers highlight various instances of the latter exerting a ‘strong hand’ over benefices and installing clerics with close kinship ties. A mandate of 1434-5 on behalf of Thady, the Bishop of Killaloe, stated that he was hindered by ‘James, bishop in the universal church’ - probably James O’Lonergan of Killaloe<sup>48</sup> - from ‘exercising the administration of his...church of Killaloe, and from taking the fruits [ie. annual revenue] of the episcopal *mensa* and the vassals and subjects of the said church from obeying him’.<sup>49</sup> Thady alleged that ecclesiasts and laymen, including ‘Mcnamara captain of his nation...and John Meicommead eiusdem nationis Adorendreis<sup>50</sup>... injure him in respect of certain tithes, fruits, possessions etc. of the said *mensa*’.<sup>51</sup> The mandate is suggestive of the sway Mac Conmara chieftains of east Clare held over the diocesan economy. The mandate hints at the economy of the bishopric with its mensal lands to support the office of bishop through producing foodstuffs, probably farmed by a caste of hereditary ecclesiastical tenants under the stewardship of an erenagh family.

### **The Mac an Oirchinnigh of *Tradraighe***

Documented accounts of Mac an Oirchinnigh clerics would suggest that the sept was well represented in the parishes of Kilnasoolagh, Kilmaleery and Clonloghen in the fifteenth century. The Mac an Oirchinnigh were the primary sept in supplying clerics to Kilnasoolagh, though their influence there was not necessarily that of ‘natural incumbency’ found amongst the hereditary termon lands.<sup>52</sup> It is therefore uncertain whether the early *airchinneach* career of the Mac an Oirchinnigh began in Kilnasoolagh; the traditional genealogies may be correct to assert their *airchinneach* origins lay with Killaloe in the twelfth century - though whether they held hereditary termon lands is less clear and difficult to now identify.<sup>53</sup>

The Mac an Oirchinnigh secured numerous church appointments in *Tradraighe*. These included, aside from others already mentioned, appointments at the Mac Conmara controlled parishes of Quin, Bunratty and Kilfintanan, as well as the rectory of Drumline and the small rectory of Tymorlogyg in Quin parish. The presence of

<sup>48</sup> A note under this reads: ‘James O’Lonergan, who received provision of Killaloe on Dec. 9 1429’.

<sup>49</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VIII AD.1427-1447*, pp 504-5.

<sup>50</sup> This should be read as ‘John Meicommead [John son of Cú Meadha] of the same ‘nation’ - ie a Mac Conmara kinsman. The Latin word *Adorendreis* cannot be identified.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 505.

<sup>52</sup> The 1641 *Books of Survey and Distribution* record that Kilnasoolagh vicarage comprised 43 Irish acres of glebe land. K.W Nicholls notes that where a church had an endowment of tithes and became an ecclesiastical benefice then any vestige of the coarb or erenagh system broke down. When the church endowment consisted only of lands it remained the hereditary office of a particular family. Kilnasoolagh vicarage, and after its creation as a rectory in 1463 united with Bunratty (‘Tradry’) and the Treasurership of Killaloe, was an ecclesiastical benefice under the bishop’s ordinary authority. The temporary creation of Kilnasoolagh as a rectory with ‘cure of the souls of the parishioners’ (continuing its vicarial status) in 1463 was collated by the Roman Curia and the installation of clerics there was under ordinary authority, not under lay patronage, Nicholls, ‘Rectory, Vicarage and Parish’, p. 66. On the temporary creation of Kilnasoolagh as a rectory in 1463 see Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. XII AD.1458-1471*, p. 195. Also see Simington, *Books of Survey and Distribution, Vol. 4, Clare*, p. 157.

<sup>53</sup> An intriguing reference exists in an inquisition concerning John McNamara of the barony of Dangan-i-viggin, taken at Galway on 27 January 1585 (*recte* 1586). The inquisition, in setting out lands exempt from secular tribute, record Clonloghan, Kilnasoolagh, Kilmaleery and Carrigoran as belonging to the bishopric of Killaloe. The reference to Carrigoran is significant as it was part of the sept-land of the Mac an Oirchinnigh. Could it be that Carrigoran (and Kilnasoolagh) were held by the Mac an Oirchinnigh as chief tenants of the Bishop of Killaloe? A reference in 1616 to a ‘James mac Enernie’ occupying the church lands of Kilnasoolagh (43 acres) that were claimed by the Protestant Bishop of Killaloe may suggest that the termons there were under the stewardship of the Mac an Oirchinnigh. See R.W Twigge, *Materials for a History of Clann Cuilein*, Add MS 39260, Twigge Collection, British Library, pp 180-6. Also see MS 1777, ‘survey of lands in the diocese of Killaloe’ pp 11-12. The author has consulted the original MSS of Bishop Worth held in the Church Representative Library and can confirm the spelling as ‘mac Enerni’, rather than ‘mac Everni’ as given in the typescript version by Leslie.

numerous Mac an Oirchinnigh references in the Papal Registers indicates that they were a sept strongly represented in *Tradraighe* in the early fifteenth century; a point shared by their representation there centuries later in 1641.<sup>54</sup>

### **Kilmaleery and Kilnasoolagh**

The earliest recording of the Mac an Oirchinnigh in the Papal Registers dates from 1411 and despite inconsistencies in spelling, cross referencing indicates that ‘Matthew Macmeyrcheyn’ (Mathghamhain Mac an Oirchinn)<sup>55</sup> was first recorded as holding Quin and Bunratty perpetual benefices that were ‘both without cure and called rectories’ in 1411.<sup>56</sup> Matthew was also assigned the perpetual vicarage of Kilmaleery, and references from 1422 indicate that he also held Kilnasoolagh.<sup>57</sup>

The papal mandate connects ‘Matthew Macmeyrcheyn’ to the landholding Mac an Oirchinnigh sept based in and around Kilnasoolagh. The mandate from Rome states that he was of ‘ducal race’<sup>58</sup> and in his nineteenth year, placing his birth in the year 1392. The mandate is clear in asserting that he was of aristocratic lineage, linking him to the main lineage of the Mac an Oirchinnigh sept. Secondly, his level of education can be inferred from the reference ‘if found fit in Latin’ he was to be assigned the vicarage of Kilmaleery. His youth must have been unusual for a cleric of his status and the mandate makes clear that provision will be granted to him to hold the vicarage of Kilmaleery despite his ‘defect of age’. The fact that he held the perpetual benefices of the rectories without cure of Quin and Bunratty, and was assigned the perpetual vicarage<sup>59</sup> of Kilmaleery in 1411, and at a later date Kilnasoolagh, suggests that he was a successful cleric:

[8 July, 1411] To the dean of Killaloe. Mandate to collate and assign to Matthew Macmeyrcheyn, perpetual beneficiary in the parish church of Cuyngkyg [*sic* Quin], in the said diocese, of ducal race and in his nineteenth year only, if found fit in Latin, the perpetual vicarage, value not exceeding 3 marks, of Killmaliery [*sic* Kilmaleery] in the same diocese, void because Thady Macconnyl has held it more than a year without having himself ordained a priest and without dispensation; notwithstanding that he holds his perpetual benefice in the said parish church, and another in that of Bunraythi [*sic* Bunratty] in the same diocese, both without cure and called rectories, the value of which likewise does not exceed 3 marks. He is hereby dispensed, on account of his said defect of age, to hold the vicarage.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Simington, *Books of Survey and Distribution*, Vol. 4, p. 148, pp 157-160, p. 163, p 169, p. 171. On the genealogy of the Mac an Oirchinnigh see Luke McInerney, ‘Survey of the McInerney Sept of Thomond: Part I’, *The Other Clare*, vol. 31 (2007) pp 67-72 (and Part II in *The Other Clare*, vol. 32 (2008) pp 27-35).

<sup>55</sup> The version of the surname is the compacted form of Mac an Oirchinnigh – ie. Mac an Oirchinn. The possibility that ‘Macmeyrcheyn’ is a different surname is slight given that the reference relates to four parishes associated with the sept and the surname retains the internal ‘ch’ phonetic that is characteristic in spellings of Mac an Oirchinnigh. See Rev. Patrick Woulfe, *Sloinnnte Gaedheal is Gall: Irish Names and Surnames* (Dublin, 1923) pp 308-09.

<sup>56</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VI AD.1404-1415* (London, 1904) pp 256-7.

<sup>57</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VII AD.1417-1431*, pp 236-7. Also see the entries for 1424 and 1427.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Ducal race’ referred to Matthew being related to the landholding lineage of the sept whose chief representative was the *ceannfine*.

<sup>59</sup> A perpetual vicar was a cleric who had the right to the vicarial benefice for their lives (a portion of the tithe) and were not removable except for a canonical offence or some irregularity. Gleeson, *Diocese of Killaloe*, p. 294.

<sup>60</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VI AD.1404-1415*, pp 256-7.

It is likely that for Matthew to have held the perpetual benefices of Quin and Bunratty rectories concurrently at the age of nineteen he was a non-resident scholar-cleric. He may, however, have intended to reside at Kilmaleery vicarage - and hence this mandate dispensing him to hold the vicarage on proof of his skill in Latin - as this vicarage was charged with cure; he drew a partial income from the perpetual benefices of the rectories of Quin and Bunratty to support himself, perhaps on account of either study or official work.

Four subsequent mandates were issued relating to Kilnasoolagh during 1422-1427, suggesting that Matthew died sometime before 1422 making him less than thirty at the time of death.<sup>61</sup> These mandates also show that Matthew held the vicarage of Kilnasoolagh, granted to him sometime after the 1411 grant of Kilmaleery.<sup>62</sup> The mandates are useful in understanding the level of ecclesiastical organisation at the time and confirm that the position of vicar at Kilnasoolagh received 'certain tithes and rents'.<sup>63</sup> Matthew also held the perpetual benefice of Tymorlogyg and the rectory of Drumline to which the former was usually united, and both without cure.<sup>64</sup> The Papal Registers indicates that this collation was made prior to 1422, or so we can infer from a mandate of 1427 that posthumously referred to 'Matthew Macmuerchyay'.<sup>65</sup> According to a petition from Killaloe to Rome and compiled in *Regestum Supplicationum* probably in the year 1419:

Matthew Mcnemayrkyny clerk of Killaloe, has studied canon law for several years, petitions for perpetual vicarage of parish church of Kyllanasulech, vacant through death of Rory Ylonyrageyn, or in some other way, though he already holds the simple rectories of Tymurlogach and Drúlygayll.<sup>66</sup>

A second petition in *Regestum Supplicationum* dated 4 August 1419 re-states the petition of Matthew and outlines his 'noble' background:

Matthew Mcnemayrkyny, clerk of Killaloe who studied canon law for some years and is of noble lineage, petitions for the perpetual vicarage of the parish church of Kyllana Suleth in that diocese, which is vacant either by the death of Rory

<sup>61</sup> For the two mandates for 4 April, 1422 and 5 May 1427 not reproduced here see Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VII AD.1417-1431*, pp 236-7 and p. 510.

<sup>62</sup> On the grant of Kilmaleery in 1422 see Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VII AD.1417-1431*, p. 236.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p.359.

<sup>64</sup> See note 44 in Dermot F. Gleeson, 'Obligaciones Pro Annatis Diocesis Laoniensis: 1421-1535', *Archivium Hibernicum*, vol. 10 (1943) pp 1-103:16. It would appear that Tymorlogyg (Tymurloga, Thomurlog, etc) was a small rectory without cure located in the parish of Quin. The Papal Registers indicate that Tymorlogyg commanded modest revenues and was united to the rectory of Drumline, with Tymorlogyg rectory being under lay patronage. Drumline was perpetually annexed to the treasurership of Killaloe, and the Bishop of Killaloe received the rectorial tithes of the townland of Drumline. The Papal Registers record both the vicarage of Drumline (see years 1429 & 1465) as well as the rectory without cure of the parish church 'in ecclesiastical fee' of Drumline (see 1455, 1458). It was from the latter that the Bishop of Killaloe derived revenue from. See Nicholls, 'Rectory, Vicarage and Parish', pp 78-9.

<sup>65</sup> The mandate of 1427 was recovered from the burnt register of Pope Martin V in 1443. The reference to 'Matthew Macmuerchyay' is likely to be Matthew who held the benefices of Quin and Bunratty in 1411. That the mandate was written in 1427 and refers to Matthew having been deceased by that stage, and the benefices of Tymorlogyg and Drumline being void on account of his death, points to Matthew of 1411. Also see Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol.IX AD.1431-1447*, pp 399-400.

<sup>66</sup> See *ASV Regestum Supplicationum* 129f. 63. This is also excerpted and published in Special List 43 available at the National Library of Ireland Manuscripts Reading Room. In terms of date, this excerpt appears under the chapter 'Second Year of the Pontificate of Martin V, 21 Nov 1418 – 20 Nov 1419'.

Ylornygayn at the Roman curia, or for some other reason, although Matthew already holds the simple rectory of Tynnirlogach and that of Drumlygall in ecclesiastical fee. 4. non Aug.<sup>67</sup>

These petitions confirm that Matthew was a scholar-cleric and possibly sought higher orders given his study of canon law, though at the time of his death he was still in minor orders.<sup>68</sup> The petitions also state that he held the rectories of Tymurlogach (Tymorlogyg in Quin parish) and Drúlygayll (Drumline), which were sinecure rectories and probably provided him with an income to support his studies. The reference to ‘Matthew Mcnemayrkyny’ being of ‘noble lineage’ is cited in both the papal mandates and *Regestum Supplicationum* and links him to the landholding lineage of the Mac an Oirchinnigh sept of Kilnasoolagh parish.

Matthew did not receive the vicarage of Kilnasoolagh until at least 1419. We can only guess where he studied canon law, though the initial reference to him in 1411 as holding the perpetual benefice of Quin - which functioned as an important rectory in *Tradraighe* - could also have served as a place of study given its proximity to Quin friary. It is significant that Matthew is the only recorded Mac an Oirchinnigh kinsman to hold Quin. Quin was traditionally dominated by members of the Mac Conmara clan despite the Uí Bhriain being the lay patrons.<sup>69</sup>

More contentious was the appointment in 1443 of ‘Dermot Macinnercheny’ (Diarmaid Mac an Oirchinnigh) to the vicarage of Kilnasoolagh. His appointment came after a certain ‘Donatus Ydulayg’ (Donnchadh Ó Dubhloich, *anglice* O’Dowley)<sup>70</sup> resigned the vicarage, having held it since his appointment there in 1422 on the death of ‘Matthew Macanaerehynyg’ (above mentioned).<sup>71</sup> Dermot’s appointment in 1443 returned Kilnasoolagh to the hands of the Mac an Oirchinnigh immediately after it was held for about two decades by a member of the ‘Odublaych’ sept. The fact that Dermot was of ‘noble race’ and that he and two other Mac an Oirchinnigh clerics possessed the vicarage of Kilnasoolagh in the fifteenth century, confirms the presence of the ruling or ‘noble’ lineage of the sept in the vicinity of Kilnasoolagh. The documents *Obligaciones Pro Annatis Diocesis Laoniensis*,<sup>72</sup> record the appointment of clerics and the ‘Annates’ - value of the parish revenue - for the purpose of papal ecclesiastical assessment known as the ‘first fruits’. The Killaloe ‘Annates’ confirm the installation of ‘Dermicio

<sup>67</sup> See *ASV Regestum Supplicationum* 131, 34-34v, Special List 43, available at the National Library of Ireland Manuscripts Reading Room. The spelling could be ‘Tymirlogach’, on inspection of the original mandate.

<sup>68</sup> See the mandate issued on 4 April, 1422 in relation to ‘Cornelius Ogryffa’ and his appointment to the vicarage of Kilmaleery. The vicarage of Kilmaleery was vacant and void because ‘the late Matthew McYnaerchynnyger held it more than a year without having himself ordained a priest and without dispensation’. *Ibid.*, pp 236-7.

<sup>69</sup> Gleeson is mistaken to assert that the Mac Conmara were the lay patrons of Quin as the records indicate otherwise, see Nicholls, ‘Rectory, Vicarage and Parish’ p. 59, and also see the mandate of 3 June, 1472 in Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VIII AD.1471-1484* (London, 1955) p. 302.

<sup>70</sup> See Woulfe, *Sloinnté Gaedheal is Gall*, p. 512. According to Woulfe, the Ó Dubhloich were dispersed from County Meath and settled in the territory of Ely O’Carroll in north Tipperary, while another distinct sept were located in southeast County Galway. Another possible origin for the name is Ó Daláigh (O’Daley), a professional poetic sept with a notable branch that settled in the Burren during the mid-thirteenth century. This name appears in the list of Irish families for the barony of Bunratty in the ‘1659 Census’ and may be the real origin of the name ‘Ydulayg’ which is variously spelt ‘Odublaych’ and ‘Odulayg’ in the Papal Registers for the years 1422 and 1424, see Woulfe, *Sloinnté Gaedheal is Gall*, p. 493 and Séamus Pender (ed.), *A Census of Ireland Circa 1659* (Dublin, 1939) p. 168.

<sup>71</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VII AD.1417-1431*, p. 236.

<sup>72</sup> Gleeson, ‘Obligaciones Pro Annatis Diocesis Laoniensis’, pp 1-103.

Macumercheny' to Kilnasoolagh vicarage probably in June 1443, and that he was obliged to pay the 'first fruits' of the yearly tithes of '*sex marcharum sterlingorum*' (6 marks sterling) to the diocese.<sup>73</sup>

Dermit provides a good case study of the intertwined world of kinship and clan and how these social ties in Gaelic Ireland were the real logic behind clerics furthering secular ambitions through ecclesiastical office. In 1449-1450 Dermit was summoned to be removed from Kilnasoolagh due to allegations of abuse of his office which included simony, failure to be ordained a priest after installation, perjury and dilapidation of goods from the vicarage. This trend is suggestive that lay preferment was common and nepotism often the method of advancement:

[4 March 1449-1450] To the archbishop, archdeacon and treasurer of Cashel. Mandate to collate and assign to Matthew de Maccomara, rector of Bunrathi [*sic* Bunratty] alias Traddry in the diocese of Killaloe who is by both parents of noble birth, the perpetual vicarage of Killathnasuleach [*sic* Kilnasoolagh] in the said diocese, value not exceeding 8 marks sterling, void because Dermit Macinnaerchynnyd, who is to be summoned and removed, having obtained collation in virtue of papal letters, held possession for more than a year without having himself ordained priest, from fear of whose power Matthew cannot safely meet him in the city and diocese of Killaloe; whether it be void as stated, or because Dermit has been a perjurer and dilapidator of the goods of the vicarage, or because in the obtaining of it he committed simony with Donatus Oduluyd, or by resignation of the said Donatus, or be void in any other way; and notwithstanding that he holds the said rectory, with cure, and the rectory without cure of Clonlothan [*sic* Clonloghan] in the same diocese, which is called in ecclesiastical fee, and a canony of Limerick and the prebend of Donachmoyr, value not exceeding 32, 1 and 8 marks sterling respectively. Upon obtaining the vicarage he is to resign the rectory of Bunrathi [*sic* Bunratty].<sup>74</sup>

This mandate suggests that Dermit's simoniacal deal with 'Donatus Oduluyd' - the previous cleric who supposedly resigned in 1443 - had more to do with dividing the tithes revenue of Kilnasoolagh between the long-standing incumbent Donatus and the newly installed Dermit. The fact that 'Matthew de Maccomara rector of Bunrathi' (*sic* Bunratty) was to be assigned the vicarage may hint toward greater Mac Conmara control over outlying vicarages that had fallen under the influence of local septs. The mention of 'dilapidator of the goods of the vicarage' - which was a common accusation by 'delators' recorded in the Papal Registers - could be a veiled reference to Dermit using the vicarage as a source of patronage. Unfortunately we do not know the outcome of the allegation and whether Dermit was removed. The activities of Gaelic clergy often ran counter to canon law rules and were a convenient pretext for dismissal by aspiring clerics who coveted lucrative benefices. It is not surprising that a Mac Conmara cleric is proposed to replace Dermit; such allegations were often motivated by secular interests of powerful clans and had little to do with legitimate allegations of misconduct.

An important papal mandate dated 2 June 1463 was issued from Rome to unite the vicarage of Kilnasoolagh with the Treasurership of Killaloe and the rectory of Bunratty. The mandate was written in favour of a high status Mac Conmara cleric named 'Odo

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>74</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. X AD.1447-1455*, pp 440-1.

[son] of James Mac Conmara'. Odo (Aodh) held the diocesan post of Treasurer of Killaloe.<sup>75</sup> This mandate to form a temporary rectory out of Kilnasoolagh to support Odo with a benefice 'on account of the slenderness of the treasury'<sup>76</sup> may have been in response to past monopolisation of the vicarage by local septs. The encroachment of Mac Conmara clerics over the rectorial tithe of the united Kilnasoolagh and Bunratty parishes was short-lived, however, as Odo was recorded in a mandate of 8 October 1463 as having 'died at the apostolic see' in Rome before execution of his petition for the united rectory with the treasurership.<sup>77</sup> The creation of a rectory at Kilnasoolagh, and its collation with the Treasurership of Killaloe and rectory of Bunratty, must have been a temporary event as Kilnasoolagh is mentioned in a papal mandate of 6 May 1482 as simply a vicarage valued at 8 marks.<sup>78</sup>

The papal mandates relating to Kilnasoolagh provide a useful kaleidoscope of clans that were located in the neighborhood of Kilnasoolagh. A 1405 mandate refers to 'Donatus Mclanhega', who unmistakably was a member of Mac Flannchadha brehon clan, confirming an early connection of that clan to Kilnasoolagh.<sup>79</sup> This example offers further light on the Mac Flannchadha clan as a mandate dated 1418 states that Donatus also held the rectory of Glæ (parish of Killlilagh) in the diocese of Kilfenora and which was located on the traditional sept-land of the Mac Flannchadha.<sup>80</sup> Thus, Donatus' mandate alludes to an early Glæ/Kilnasoolagh connection of the Mac Flannchadha, which may have been approximately contemporaneous to the settlement of a branch of the Mac Flannchadha at Ballysallagh West in Kilnasoolagh parish.<sup>81</sup>

Other minor septs that occur in the Kilnasoolagh mandates include 'O dublaych' (Ó Dubhlaoich),<sup>82</sup> 'O machayn' (Ó Mocháin or Ó Maicín)<sup>83</sup> and 'Oflannura' (Ó Flannabhra).<sup>84</sup> Clerics of the name 'Oheny' (Ó hÉanna)<sup>85</sup> and Ogriffa (Ó Griobhtha),<sup>86</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. XII AD.1458-1471*, p. 195.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. The Treasurership was normally sustained by the rectorial tithes from the parish of Drumline. So union with Kilnasoolagh as a temporary rectory must have reflected the poor state of the Treasury. Kilnasoolagh's creation as a rectory had its origin in this mandate of 1463, as prior to this it was a vicarage attached to the rectory of Bunratty, Gleeson, *Diocese of Killaloe*, p. 300.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>78</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VIII AD.1471-1484*, p. 754.

<sup>79</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VI AD.1404-1415*, p. 42.

<sup>80</sup> The Mac Flannchadha (MacClancy) legal family had their bailiwick at *Tuath Glæ*. The main lineage of the clan centered on the parish of Killlilagh down to the mid seventeenth century. According to *Suim Ciosa Ua Briain* ('The Rental of Ó Bhriain') the Mac Flannchadha were located at *Tuatha Glæ* and held lands immune from rent. See James Hardiman (ed.), 'Ancient Irish Deeds and Writings Chiefly relating to Landed Property from the Twelfth to Seventeenth Century: With Translation, Notes and a Preliminary Essay', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, xv (1826) pp 36-43:42. On the 1418 mandate see Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VII AD.1417-1431*, p. 108.

<sup>81</sup> In 1574 Mac Flannchadha kinsmen occupied the towerhouses at Clonloghan, Stonehall and Urlan. See R. W Twigge, 'Edward White's Description of Thomond in 1574', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, vol.1, no.2 (1910) pp 75-85:79-80. The Mac Flannchadha also occupied Ballysallagh West, Stonehall and Urlan four years earlier in 1570 where one was described as a 'brehon' and another as a 'priest.' See Martin Breen, 'A 1570 List of Castles in County Clare', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, vol.xxxvi (1995) pp 130-8:132-3.

<sup>82</sup> Woulfe, *Sloinnté Gaedheal is Gall*, p. 512. See the Papal Registers for the years 1422 & 1443.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 617 & p. 594. See the Papal Registers for the years 1424 & 1483.

<sup>84</sup> The Ó Flannabhra were originally based in Limerick but became dispersed throughout Munster. Woulfe, *Sloinnté Gaedheal is Gall*, p. 530. See the Papal Registers for the year 1483.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.562. Woulfe regarded a branch of the Ó hÉanna as a Dalcassian sept of Thomond and an ecclesiastical family that produced several notable ecclesiasts. There is also a Limerick branch of the family that is of Eoghanacht origin. See the Papal Registers for the years 1427 & 1468.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 546. See the Papal Registers for the years 1422 & 1424.

as well as ‘Omurluayn’ (Ó Maoláin or O’Maelane)<sup>87</sup> are recorded for Kilmaleery. These suggest that minor septs were successful in obtaining positions at the smaller parishes such as the two Ó hÉanna clerics who occupied Kilmaleery in c.1427 and 1468 and the three ‘Macgyllamury’ (Mac Giolla Mhuire) clerics who served at Clonloghan for the years c.1417, 1427 and 1464. But the principal trend which can be seen throughout the Papal Registers is the infiltration of Mac Conmara clerics into many local vicarages in east Clare - a trend consistent with their status as overlord clan in east Clare.

While evidence points to Kilnasoolagh as a vicarage whose ‘cure is exercised by a chaplain’<sup>88</sup> and in the fifteenth century associated with the Mac an Oirchinnigh, it is unclear whether the benefice was in the possession of either a coarb (Latin *plebani*)<sup>89</sup> or erenagh family. In this respect, Kilnasoolagh is similar to neighbouring parishes in *Tradraighe* in terms of whether the ancient coarb and erenagh system - once a part of the Gaelic ecclesiastical economy - was still extant after the settlement and collapse of the Norman colony. The presence of termon lands ‘in ecclesiastical fee’ in various *Tradraighe* parishes may suggest a partial continuation of erenagh clans on these lands, despite the disruptive changes wrought by Norman settlement on the Irish diocesan economy in the thirteenth century.

In determining the presence of an erenagh clan at Kilnasoolagh and surrounding parishes it is important to consider that any prior erenagh connection may have been absorbed into the reorganization of church lands after the 1210 Synod of Connacht when the coarb and erenagh became principal tenants of the diocesan bishop.<sup>90</sup> This move was likely to result in their downgrading in status as quasi-ecclesiastical clans became chief tenants of the bishop, though their sept-head (*ceannfine*) held both the secular status of chief representative of the clan, as well as the status of erenagh. Norman influence in *Tradraighe* in the thirteenth century may have resulted in changes to Gaelic forms of ecclesiastical economy. In the anglicised areas of Ireland, Norman settlement resulted in the disappearance of erenaghs and coarbs from the diocesan economy.<sup>91</sup>

The presence of church lands in Kilnasoolagh parish that owed rent to the Bishop of Killaloe may point to the occupancy of an erenagh clan there as episcopal tenants.<sup>92</sup> The existence, if at all, of an erenagh family from the fifteenth century in Kilnasoolagh could be envisaged as a landholding local clan that had stewardship of church lands and paid a chief rent, and provided noxials, to the Bishop of Killaloe. In this situation it would be expected that they would provide a steady supply of clerics to local benefices,

<sup>87</sup> This surname appears to have been recorded as ‘O’Maelane’ in the Island Barony in the 1659 ‘census’, Pender (ed.), *A Census of Ireland*, Island Barony chapter. The Irish form of the name possibly is Ó Maoláin or Ó Maoileáin and rendered in English as Mullen or Mullan(e), Woulfe, *Sloinnte Gaedheal is Gall*, p. 139 & p. 603. See the Papal Registers for the year 1497.

<sup>88</sup> Thus it was described in c.1418. See *ASV Regestum Supplicationum* 109 f.183. I am grateful to K.W. Nicholls for providing this reference.

<sup>89</sup> The Papal Registers often describe coarbs by the Latin term of *plebani*, though not always. A papal mandate dated 1461 referring to the Diocese of Derry, mentions ‘Donald OKaan, rector of the parish church of St Cainnech Drumachose called the comorbanship de Roho’. The mandate contained the accusation of willful murder of a layman by Donald OKaan. The delator, in this case Maurice Okaan, was presumably a kinsman of Donald who sought the lucrative rectory valued at 40 marks. Undoubtedly the possession of the rectory was kept tightly within the ranks of the ‘OKaan’ (Ó Catháin) coarb family and, despite the allegations of clerical misconduct and murder, it is a telling point that the delator was a kinsman of the incumbent coarb. See Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. XII AD.1458-1471*, p. 141.

<sup>90</sup> Gleeson, *Diocese of Killaloe*, p. 139.

<sup>91</sup> Kenneth Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin, 1972) p. 128.

<sup>92</sup> See note 53 above regarding the church lands of Carrigoran and Kilnasoolagh recorded in the 1586 inquisition of the barony of Dangan-i-viggin.

and were possibly literate and of quasi-clerical status. While still unclear, circumstantial evidence suggests that the Mac an Oirchinnigh *may have* had the trappings of an erenagh sept in Kilnasoolagh during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. However, the specific arrangements that prevailed in the parish up to the sixteenth century are now difficult to quantify.

### **Bunratty and Clonloghan**

In 1443 a Mac an Oirchinnigh cleric held the lucrative vicarage of Bunratty. Many references in the Papal Registers are of the rectory of 'Tradray' under the 'patronage of laymen'<sup>93</sup> Bunratty was a principal parish benefice in *Tradraighe* and its position was boosted by its status of being 'united' with the rectory of 'Ogashin' which comprised the rectory of Quin.<sup>94</sup> A mandate of 1443 assigned 'Matthew Machynerhynyd' (Mathghamhain Mac an Oirchinnigh) the 'perpetual vicarage of Bunrachtyd' (*sic* Bunratty). The mandate also stipulated the removal of the incumbent priest named 'John Macgillamurhyd'.<sup>95</sup> The 'Macgillamurhyd' sept (Mac Giolla Mhuire),<sup>96</sup> while not of local Dalcassian origin, held several appointments as parish clerics at Bunratty and Clonloghan during the fifteenth century; the name seems to have died out and does not appear in the seventeenth century records.<sup>97</sup>

According to the 1443 mandate, John Macgillamurhyd had set himself up in the vicarage for over three years, and was the receiver of the vicarial tithes. John Macgillamurhyd's breach of canonical law and his alleged usurpation of the vacant vicarage in about the year 1440 had caused his undoing. What is less certain is whether the sept of Macgillamurhyd held Bunratty because they had special privilege to do so. Members of the Mac Giolla Mhuire can be found as incumbents at Clonloghan. The fact that the mandate stated that Matthew Machynerhynyd 'fears to meet [John Macgillamurhyd] in the city or diocese of Killaloe' highlights that possession of the vicarage was contested and hostile.<sup>98</sup>

The surname 'Macgillamurhyd' crops up in another mandate relating to another Mac an Oirchinnigh, this time at Clonloghan. The mandate dated 17 November 1464 records the removal of Thady Maccauchryne (Tadhg Mac an Oirchinnigh):

[17 November 1464] To Denis Odeach, canon of Killaloe. Mandate, as below.  
The pope has been informed by Laurence Macconmara, clerk, of the diocese of Killaloe, that Thady Maccauchryne, perpetual vicar of the parish church of the place of Clonlochan [*sic* Clonloghan] in the said diocese, has dilapidated and

<sup>93</sup> See, for example, Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VII AD.1417-1431*, p. 352.

<sup>94</sup> This was probably the case in 1411 in relation to 'Matthew Macmeyercheyn' who held both Quin and Bunratty. See Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VI AD.1404-1415*, pp 256-7.

<sup>95</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. IX AD.1431-1447*, p. 404.

<sup>96</sup> Woulfe, *Sloinnte Gaedheal is Gall*, p. 377.

<sup>97</sup> See the Papal Registers for Clonloghan for 2 May 1427 which refers to 'Malachy Macgyllamury' and 'Cornelius Macgyllamury' which suggested that they were closely related, perhaps proof that the Mac Giolla Mhuire were an entrenched clerical family based in the vicinity of the ex-Norman parishes of Clonloghan and Bunratty. In 1464 mention is made in the Papal Registers to 'Cornelius Mickellamure' (a compounded form of the name) in connection to Clonloghan. Woulfe places the Mac Giolla Mhuire as having their seat at County Down, Woulfe, *Sloinnte Gaedheal is Gall*, p. 377. Nicholls suggests that the Mac Giolla Mhuire of Waterford were of Ostman origin based on a reference to the family in 1283 in the city and county of Waterford in a charter of Henry II, hence their namesake in *Tradraighe* may have originally been an Ostman family of Limerick. I am grateful to K. W. Nicholls for his advice on this subject. Also see G. J. Hand, 'The Status of the Native Irish in the Lordship of Ireland, 1272-1331', *The Irish Jurist*, vol. 1, summer (1966), pp 93-115: 113.

<sup>98</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. IX AD.1431-1447* (London, 1912) p. 404.

alienated the moveable goods of the said vicarage, has kept in his own house a concubine, by whom he has had offspring, and has committed perjury, to the shame of the priestly dignity, about which things he is defamed in those parts. The pope therefore hereby orders the above canon, if Laurence, who alleges that he is by both parents of a race of dukes, will accuse Thady before the said canon, to summon Thady and others concerned, and if he find the foregoing to be true, to deprive and remove Thady, and in that event to collate and assign the said vicarage, value not exceeding 4 marks sterling, to Laurence; whether it be then void by such deprivation and removal; or be still void by the death of Cornelius Mickellamure, or in any other way.<sup>99</sup>

This mandate sheds light on the lineage-based society that prevailed during the high-point of the Gaelic revival in the fifteenth century. The mandate shows a cleric of the overlord clan, the Mac Conmara, claiming the important benefice of Clonloghan on the basis of the common abuse of keeping a ‘concubine’. While it is impossible to be certain, it is probable that Laurence Mac Conmara was taking advantage of the common breach of canon law on the rule of celibacy (a rule routinely ignored by Gaelic clergy up to the seventeenth century<sup>100</sup>) to gain possession of the lucrative benefice of Clonloghan and its extensive ecclesiastical lands. Again, we do not have any record of the outcome of this dispute, but it is likely that Laurence Mac Conmara financed the suit at the Roman Curia, indicating that he was of high status (he was of noble parentage) and possibly instigated the suit as a means to gain the vicarage.

The Mac Conmara were popular clerics at Clonloghan due to their frequent control over the Clonloghan benefice called ‘in ecclesiastical fee’ (termon lands) which was generally awarded to high status non-resident clerics at Killaloe. The Mac Conmara provided at least six clerics to Clonloghan throughout the fifteenth century, compared to three clerics of the aforementioned family of Macgillamurhyd (Mac Giolla Mhuire) who were based nearby at Bunratty, and two clerics of the Mac an Oirchinnigh sept in 1464 and 1483. The wealth of Clonloghan and its attached termon lands were worth fighting over as a mandate in 1497 tells of a dispute between Rory Macconmara, canon and treasurer of the church of Killaloe, and locally based Mac Conmara kinsmen.<sup>101</sup> Clonloghan was not entirely monopolised by the powerful Mac Conmara; local septs such as the ‘Maccauchryne’, (Mac an Oirchinnigh) ‘Mickellamure’ (Mac Giolla Mhuire) and ‘Yheny’ (Ó hÉanna) also managed to have had a toe-hold there.

From these mandates we understand that ecclesiastical discipline was lacking from the parishes of east Clare. We can also infer that clerics from the vassal-septs were not immune from opportunistic allegations by clerics from powerful clans who coveted local benefices. The Papal Registers, however, often show only part of the story. While our understanding of the motivation, extent of clerical misconduct and outcomes of the allegations are not complete, the general picture is that churches were ruled by the strong hand of the vassal-septs and clerical appointments were a precarious affair often open to opportunistic layman rather than devoted clerics.

<sup>99</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. XII AD.1458-1471*, p. 410.

<sup>100</sup> A reference in 1603 in the will of ‘Connoghur Mc Donnogho O’Brien’ of Dromoland to ‘John McEnerhyny ‘prist’ and James his son’ who had a quarter of Dromoland in mortgage, indicates the flouting of church rules on celibacy by Gaelic clergy up to the early seventeenth century. John Ainsworth (ed.), *The Inchiquin Manuscripts* (Dublin, 1961) entry no.1481, p. 504.

<sup>101</sup> Anne P. Fuller, *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters Vol.XVI Lateran Registers Part One: AD.1492-1498*, p. 454.

In 1483 ‘Laurence Macnoyerhyne’ (Lorcán Mac an Oirchinnigh), a cleric of the noble birth by ‘both parents’ was assigned the vicarage of Clonloghan.<sup>102</sup> His appointment must have been uncontroversial and his tenure uneventful as we do not hear of him again. Parish mandates allow us to assess the growth in the rectorial and vicarial tithes. The value of the assessed tithe at Kilnasoolagh, for example, ranged from 5 marks levied in 1422 to 8 marks in 1483. The value of the tithe peaked at 40 marks in 1466 when Kilnasoolagh was united to the rectory of Bunratty and Treasureship of Killaloe. The variance in the levied tithe was due to the tithe being assessed on yearly produce from the freeholders of the parish which fluctuated over time and possibly depended on the size of the benefice initially granted to the cleric. The gradual rise in the value of tithes points to growth in the agricultural economy and higher economic rents; a century-long rise suggests a rise in prices and income in the medieval Gaelic economy.

#### **Adjacent Parishes: Quin and Kilfintanan**

Quin, or ‘Ocassyn’ as it was often scribed, was an important parish benefice normally united with the rectory of Bunratty. Quin was the scene of a struggle for the possession of the rectory by various Mac Conmara clerics in 1424,<sup>103</sup> and of controversy caused by a simoniacal deal between the lay patron, Conchobhar na Srón Ó Bhriain king of Thomond, and a kinsman, ‘Dermot Obryion’ (*sic* Ó Bhriain). This instance is suggestive of the patron intruding a kinsman into a benefice that was usually the preserve of Mac Conmara clerics and their allied sept of Ó Rodáin, Ó hAllmhuráin and Ó Coirbín.<sup>104</sup>

Quin was sometimes held by hereditary control according to a reference in a 1405 mandate assigning Nicholas Mac Conmara ‘to receive and hold Bonrate [*sic*. Bunratty] and Cwnky [*sic*. Quin] together for life, notwithstanding his said illegitimacy and the fact that the said Matthew was his father and was the immediate possessor of Bonrate and Cwnky’.<sup>105</sup> The relative wealth of Quin can be seen through the assessment of the rectory as between 12 and 50 marks during the fifteenth century, the higher figure representing the collating of Quin with the canonry and prebend of Killaloe in 1470-1471.<sup>106</sup>

The Papal Registers record instances where the sons of clerics directly succeeded their fathers in benefices, sometimes though the aid of papal dispensations or by more covert means such as collusive lawsuits designed to evade canon law proscriptions against hereditary succession. An example of this hereditary succession was the death of Dermot O Longergan, dean of Killaloe, in c.1418 and the succession of son James who

<sup>102</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VIII AD.1471-1484*, p. 131.

<sup>103</sup> In 1424 several almost identical mandates were issued to assign both Donald and Thady Mac Conmara to Quin rectory. These identical mandates created problems and Donald and Thady obtained subsequent mandates to assert their legitimacy over Quin and Bunratty and confirm their claims. Another Mac Conmara, Dermot, was removed in 1427 for illegally detaining the rectory having obtained it through ‘simoniacal entry’. Gleeson, ‘Obligaciones Pro Annatis Diocesis Laoniensis’, p.7.

<sup>104</sup> Fuller *Papal Letters Vol. XVII Part II, AD.1492-1503*, pp 111-12. This mandate, dated 1502, refers to the incident of 1472 whereby the king of Thomond intruding a kinsman, Dermot Ó Bhriain, into the benefice of Quin. The mandate illustratively details the event: ‘Dermot Obryion, canon of Killaloe, improperly aspiring to the rectory...made a pact with Cornelius Obryen (the sole patron of the rectory in peaceful possession or almost of the right of presenting the suitable person for it at a time of vacancy), that if Cornelius would present him, he (Dermot) would pay him a certain amount of money, and afterwards the said patron Cornelius presented Dermot for the rectory, thus vacant, to Matthew, then bishop of Killaloe...and bishop Matthew, perhaps unaware of the said pact, by ordinary authority had, for certain just reasons, united etc. the rectory to the canonry and prebend of the church of Killaloe which Dermot was then holding...and Dermot, by pretext of this presentation and union etc., had acquired the rectory’.

<sup>105</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VI AD.1404-1415*, p. 37.

<sup>106</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VIII AD.1471-1484*, p. 302.

obtained the benefice via provision.<sup>107</sup> What was true of clerics at the metropolitan see was even more so at the local parish level where positions such as vicarships and rectorships were often ‘captured’ by local families for generations. While this does not necessarily mean direct father-son inheritance (inheritance operated among a circle of kin reflecting the collective organisation of septs), such cases were not unusual.<sup>108</sup>

Only occasionally did non-Mac Conmara kinsmen hold Quin. In 1407 ‘John oroddayn’ (Ó Rodáin), a member of an allied sept of the Mac Conmara, ‘held the vicarage before it was assigned to Laurence Omyelir.’<sup>109</sup> The Ó Rodáin were hereditary stewards of the Mac Conmara and Ó Bhriain who had their seat at Cloonmunnia in Kilmurry parish, and Ardmaclancy in Kilfinaghta parish.<sup>110</sup> The Ó Rodáin were mentioned as a ‘steward and marshal’ sept (*‘Maoir mintire Rodain agus marasgáil’*) in the c.1330 ‘Rental of Lord Mac Conmara’.<sup>111</sup> Clerics from other septs that possessed Quin include ‘John Ohalluran’ (Ó hAllmhuirín)<sup>112</sup> in c.1413, and ‘Rory Ocorbayn’ (Ó Coirbín)<sup>113</sup> who was assigned the vicarage in 1413 but was in the midst of a tussle over its possession. The Papal Registers record that Rory Ocorbayn, who was sub-deacon of the diocese of Killaloe, had difficulty being assigned Quin vicarage because ‘Laurence Omelyer’ and ‘his adherents in many ways hindered Rory from obtaining peaceful possession, whilst Rory, in order to escape vexation, gave certain small presents to Laurence’.<sup>114</sup> This may have been an example of a high-status cleric at Killaloe, in this case Rory, trying to displace a local cleric for control of an important and lucrative benefice.

In 1470 an interesting case arose where ‘Matthew Maccomarra’ was to be deposed from the rectorship of Thomurlog in Quin parish on account of him being ‘present at public battlers in which there was bloodshed and the slaying of many men’.<sup>115</sup> The unusual grounds for dismissal may have been driven by more immediate grievances on the part of Donald Maccrowan who lodged the complaint with the diocesan authorities. The mandate suggests that the position of a local cleric was not immune from danger. The pull of kinship ties probably induced some clerics to take arms against traditional rivals, even perhaps against other clerics - a practice not without precedent in Ireland.

‘Eugenius Macmuertheyny’ (Eoghan Mac an Oirchinnigh) is recorded as the cleric assigned the vicarage of Kilfintanan in 1427.<sup>116</sup> This recording is significant as it demonstrates that the Mac an Oirchinnigh were active outside of their traditional

<sup>107</sup> Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicized Ireland*, pp 110-11. This could be the James O’Longergan who held the vicarage of Kilnasoolagh in 1405 as he was a canon at Killaloe. In 1411 a Rory O’Longergan was recorded as holding Kilnasoolagh and his position was clerk and official-general of the episcopal court of Killaloe. It is possible that he was another son of Dermot O’Longergan. Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VI AD.1404-1415*, p. 42 & p. 256.

<sup>108</sup> Another example of father-son inheritance, this time regarding the benefice of Quin, is recorded in the *Regesta Supplicationum* for c.1417. It was recorded that Rudrious O Corbayn held the vicarage of Quin and vicarage of Kilraghtis but that his father, priest Reynald O Corbayn, simultaneously detained the vicarage of Kilraghtis. Rudrious sought dispensation to hold both vicarages, perhaps as part of a collusive suit supported by his father to ensure familial possession of the vicarages. See *ASV Regestum Supplicationum* 106 f.33. I am grateful to K.W. Nicholls for providing this reference.

<sup>109</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VI AD.1404-1415*, p. 116.

<sup>110</sup> James Frost, *History of Clare*, p. 413 & p. 405.

<sup>111</sup> Hardiman (ed.), ‘Ancient Irish Deeds’, p. 43.

<sup>112</sup> Woulfe, *Sloinnte Gaedheal is Gall*, p. 553.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 472.

<sup>114</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VI AD.1404-1415*, p. 367.

<sup>115</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. XII AD.1458-1471*, pp 352-3. The rectory of Thomurlog, which was under lay patronage, was located in the parish of Quin. See note 64 above.

<sup>116</sup> Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol. VII AD.1417-1431*, p. 484.

‘triangle’ of Kilnasoolagh, Kilmaleery and Clonloghan.<sup>117</sup> Kilfintanan was a comparatively modest parish with an assessed income of 8 marks.<sup>118</sup> An interesting mandate dated 18 May, 1445 stated that the vicarage of Kilfintanan and Kyllfiele (*sic* Killeely) which are ‘not more than one Italian mile apart...can be served by one man, and that their fruits etc., have been too much diminished by wars to suffice for the support of separate vicars’.<sup>119</sup> This mandate is illuminating in its reference to the impact of wars in reducing the value of the parish tithe. Another curious reference to Kilfintanan is to ‘Denis Oachaerna’ (Ó Eachthighearna)<sup>120</sup> who in 1400 ‘practice[d] the art of medicine for money, to the opprobrium of his clerical estate’.<sup>121</sup> This must be one of the earliest references to the O’Aherne, aside from the recording of the sept in the *Caithréim Thoirdealbhaigh* for the year 1308.<sup>122</sup>

This concludes the survey of the Papal Registers for *Tradraighe* and the adjacent parishes of Quin and Kilfintanan. The survey is not exhaustive and only recounts a selection of entries relating to clerical appointments and removals. The survey focused on the Mac an Oirchinnigh and some conclusions can be reached. The Mac an Oirchinnigh were an important vassal-sept and they were successful in possessing, over successive generations, the incumbencies of the vicarages at Kilnasoolagh, Kilmaleery and Clonloghan. A Mac an Oirchinnigh cleric held Kilfintanan vicarage in 1427 but subsequently no other kinsmen are recorded there. A Mac an Oirchinnigh cleric also held Quin in 1411 which is a telling point, not least because Quin was the nerve-centre of the Mac Conmara lordship. The rectories of Drumline, Tymorlogyg and Bunratty were also held by Mac an Oirchinnigh clerics, as was the important vicarage of Bunratty. It is likely that Mac an Oirchinnigh clerics were in minor religious orders, supporting the view that many parish incumbencies in Gaelic Ireland had become dominated by laymen and kinfolk of local septs who exerted control over them and had a sometimes unhealthy interest in parish finances.

Reading between the lines we are able to conclude that as an important vassal-sept of the Mac Conmara *Fionn* clan of Quin, the Mac an Oirchinnigh were based in the vicinity of Kilnasoolagh from at least *c.*1400. The fact that clerics of the name stated that they were of ‘noble race’ in order to legitimise the awarding of benefices suggests that the leading lineage of the Mac an Oirchinnigh were regarded as a noble second-order sept in the clan hierarchy. The Papal Registers, then, are a unique source for the historian and genealogist. While they do need to be read with a critical eye, especially regarding the motivation for allegations of clerical misconduct, they offer a unique window on the role of vassal-septs at the parish level and the workings of ecclesiastical administration in a Gaelic diocese. The history of medieval Clare cannot be properly documented without reference to this great repository of contemporary information.

<sup>117</sup> The ‘first fruit’ bonds for Killaloe confirm the appointment of ‘Eugenius Macinnertheny’ in June 1427. The bonds mandate that the ‘first fruits’ – the first year’s revenue of a new parish benefice – for Kilfintanan were assessed at ‘*oct marcharum sterlingorum*’ (8 marks sterling) and were payable to the diocese of Killaloe. Gleeson, ‘Obligaciones Pro Annatis Diocesis Laoniensis’, pp 13-14. Gleeson notes in reference to this appointment: ‘Macinnertheny, alias MacInerney, a well-known Clare family’.

<sup>118</sup> A mandate for 1445 records the value of Kilfintanan vicarage as 1 mark, down from 8 marks when it was assigned to Eugenius Macmuertheny 1427. Twemlow, *Papal Letters Vol.IX AD.1431-1447*, p. 495.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* The reference to wars here is obscure. However, the Irish annals record for the year 1444 the violent despoising of king Mathghamhain Ó Bhriain by his brother Toirdelbach. The annals also record for the year 1446 that a ‘great war broke out in Thomond, by which all Thomond was spoiled’. See the year entries in John O’Donovan (ed.), *AFM* (Dublin, 1856).

<sup>120</sup> Woulfe, *Sloinne Gaedheal is Gall*, pp 519-20.

<sup>121</sup> Bliss, *Papal Letters Vol.V AD.1396-1404*, p. 315.

<sup>122</sup> Seán Mac Ruaidhri Mac Craith, *Caithréim Thoirdealbhaigh: The Triumphs of Turlough*, Vol II, p. 36.

**Mac an Oirchinnigh clerics recorded as holding parish benefices  
in fifteenth century *Tradraighe* and adjacent parishes**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Parish</b>	<b>Name of Cleric [original spelling]</b>
1419-1422	<i>Kilnasoolagh vicarage</i>	Matthew Macanaerhynyg*
1443-1449	<i>Kilnasoolagh vicarage</i>	Dermot Macinercheny
1483	<i>Kilnasoolagh vicarage</i>	Laurence Macoyerhyne*
1411-1422	<i>Kilmaleery vicarage</i>	Matthew Macmeyercheyn* / MacYnaerchynnygar*
1464	<i>Clonloghan vicarage</i>	Thady Maccauchryne
1483	<i>Clonloghan vicarage</i>	Laurence Macnoyerhyne*
1411	<i>Quin rectory</i>	Matthew Macmeyercheyn*
1411	<i>Bunratty rectory</i>	Matthew Macmeyercheyn*
1443	<i>Bunratty vicarage</i>	Matthew Machynerhynyd
1427	<i>Kilfintanan vicarage</i>	Eugenius Macmuertheny
before 1419	<i>Drumline rectory &amp; benefice of Tymorlogyg</i>	Matthew Macmuerchyay* / Mcnemayrkyny*
* Clerics who held more than one parish benefice concurrently		