

Curses on the McInerney family of Co Clare: A folktale from Sixmilebridge

LUKE McINERNEY

An early nineteenth-century folktale from Co Clare is translated and published for the first time. The historical context and main themes of the story are outlined and a possible historical basis is suggested. A translation of the original Irish language is provided and a comparison made with other tales from the area.

Introduction

The fortuitous recording of a folktale in 1825¹ has been preserved amongst the collection of family documents relating to the O'Briens of Leamanagh and Dromoland, Co. Clare, in the National Library of Ireland.² The collection comprises a miscellany of verse, Ossianic poetry and tales in English from the oral tradition compiled by Sir Lucius O'Brien in c.1842. What is remarkable about this particular folktale is that it was committed to paper prior to the establishment of ethnographic folklore as a field of research. The folktale was recorded almost a century prior to the work of notable Co. Clare folklorists such as T.J. Westropp and Séamus Ó Duilearga, and prior to the Ordnance Survey visitation to Clare in 1839 which provided a 'digest' of folklore and topographical history of the county.

Antiquarian interest in the folklore of Co. Clare has a strong tradition. It was noted by John O'Donovan in 1839 when compiling the Ordnance Survey that the 'ancient traditions [of Co. Clare] are very vivid'.³ O'Donovan remained enthusiastic that the history of Clare was not extirpated due to transplantation and upheaval but still resonated on account that the "ancient proprietors were never driven out".⁴ A landed Gaelic gentry, though anglicized but conscious of its past, were sometimes sympathetic to rural traditions. The correspondence between William Smith O'Brien and Séamus Mac Cruitín in the 1840s serves as reminder of the interest in folklore traditions amongst the Co. Clare gentry.⁵ The work of Robert W. Twigge, George Unthank Macnamara and Brian O'Looney in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did much to expand on earlier folklore gleanings. However, it was Thomas J. Westropp's folklore survey of Co Clare⁶ that augmented the modern study of folklore in Clare and pre-empted the later

¹ The author wishes to acknowledge Marian O'Leary who initially located the folktale amongst the Inchiquin Papers. This paper also benefits from assistance by Brian Ó Dálaigh and Máire Ní Ghruagáin and from the insightful comments on the translation by Dr Michelle O Riordan.

² See National Library of Ireland [NLI], Inchiquin Papers, MS G990.

³ John O'Donovan & Eugene Curry, *The Antiquities of County Clare: Letters containing information relative to the Antiquities of the County of Clare collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1839; and letters and extracts relative to Ancient Territories in Thomond, 1841* (republished, Ennis, 1997), introduction.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ On Séamus Mac Cruitín (1815-70) and his association with collectors of folklore and Irish poetry see Brian Ó Dálaigh, 'The last of the hereditary bards of Thomond: Séamus Mac Cruitín 1815-70', *NMAJ*, vol. 47 (2007) pp 77-90.

⁶ Originally published in the journal *Folk-Lore: transactions of the Folk-Lore Society* 1910-13 republished as *Folklore of Clare* (Ennis, 2003).

efforts of the Folklore Commission in the 1930s⁷ and local contributors such as Máire Mac Neill⁸ in the 1940s.

The folktale presented here was initially written in 1825 by Connor Ryan in his eighty-first year in the village of Sixmilebridge, but probably copied by Sir Luicus O'Brien in c.1842. Little is known about Connor Ryan, only that he authored another folktale that can be consulted in the Inchiquin Papers (MS G990) concerning the O'Halloran family of *Faithche Uí Alluráin* (O'Halloran's Green) and that the writing of the manuscript *Caithréim Gioll mic Moirne* ('Triumphs of Goll Mac Morna') is attributed to him. This manuscript was subsequently copied by William Smith O'Brien at Dromoland in 1859.⁹ Based at Sixmilebridge, Connor Ryan must have been in the possession of - or had access to - older manuscripts. This fact places him in the literary tradition of the bi-lingual Clare scribes of the early-nineteenth century. Connor Ryan also wrote under his Gaelic name Conchubhar Ó Riain and produced various manuscripts including a genealogy for Sir Lucius O'Brien in 1823, a copy of a poem by Aindrias MacCurtin, a copy Geoffrey Keating's *Eochair-sciath an Aifrinn* in 1811, and a selection of Munster poetry copied in 1826.¹⁰ In all, Connor Ryan penned five manuscripts for Sir Lucius O'Brien (1800-1872), most of which relate to O'Brien family history and genealogy.¹¹

Connor Ryan's contemporaries included notable Clare scribes such as Peadar Ó Conaill,¹² Mícheál Mac Consaidín¹³ and the Sixmilebridge scribe Donnchadh Woulfe.¹⁴ Other near contemporaries included the poets of the Ennis 'court of poetry.'¹⁵ Lesser known Gaelic scribes include Seaghán Mac Mathghamhna¹⁶ and Conchubhar Mac In Oirchinne of Ballybaun near Ennis.¹⁷ The latter penning his contribution in various manuscripts which he collected, included a manuscript with the poem *La dá ramhamuir a nDun Bhaoi* ('The day we were in Dunboy') which was procured by Seaghán Mac Mathghamhna in 1829.¹⁸

⁷ See the extensive recording of folklore, amounting to over 19,000 pages, known as the 'Schools Collection' lodged at the UCD Delargy Centre for Irish Folklore. On a useful discussion of folklore collection in Co. Clare see Patricia Lysaght, 'Documenting the Tradition: The Work of the Irish Folklore Commission and Some of its Collectors in Co. Clare' in Matthew Lynch, & Patrick Nugent (eds) *Clare: History and Society* (Dublin, 2008) pp 541-69.

⁸ Máire Mac Neill. *The festival of Lughnasa* (London, 1962) and idem, 'Irish folklore as a source for research', *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 2 (1965) pp 340-54.

⁹ NLI MS G990 and RIA MS 1014, cited in Kathleen Mulchrone, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy* [nos 939-1133] (Dublin, 1938) pp 2895-6)

¹⁰ NLI MS G985; MS G987; MS G988; MS G989. The last two manuscripts record his name as Conchubhar Ó Maoilriain. Also see Eilís Ní Dheá, 'Scriobhathie Lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge i gContae an Chláir 1700-1900', in Lynch, & Nugent (eds) *Clare: History and Society* pp 139-55:153.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp 148-50 and Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, 'The Irish Tradition of Clare', *Mount St. Joseph's Centenary Publication* (Ennistymon, 1974) pp 49-56, see map 3.

¹³ Ní Dheá, 'Lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge i gContae an Chláir', p. 152.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153 and NLI MS G207; MS G481; MS G651; MS G1025; MS G1026.

¹⁵ On the Ennis school of poetry see, Brian Ó Dálaigh, 'Tomás Ó Míocháin and the Ennis School of Gaelic Poetry c.1130-1804', *Dal gCais*, vol.11 (1993) pp 55-73.

¹⁶ Seaghán Mac Mathghamhna was living on Horse Island in the Fergus estuary in c.1819 and is described as of 'no certain dwelling place'. Pádraig de Brún & Máire Herbert, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in Cambridge Libraries* (Cambridge, 1986) p. 95.

¹⁷ Ní Dheá, 'Lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge i gContae an Chláir', p. 152. Also see RIA MS 23 M 40. In both RIA MS 23 M 40 and Cambridge University Library, Add MS 6565. 94r, Conchubhar Mac In Oirchinne stated that he was the rightful heir of 'Clonloghan', 'Caherteige', 'Tullyglass' and 'Dromgeely'.

¹⁸ de Brún & Herbert, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in Cambridge Libraries*, p. 98. Also see Cambridge University Library, Add MS 6565. 94r.

Manuscripts were circulated amongst like-minded copyists and poets, typically re-worked and glossed by a succession of owners and scribes. Much scribal activity centered on Ennistymon during the late-eighteenth century where a strong tradition of native learning survived.¹⁹ The scribal tradition, alive in east Clare until the first half of the nineteenth century, provided an outlet for intellectual expression and was the chief reason why numerous manuscripts survive, despite their original exemplars being lost or destroyed.²⁰

The folktale presented here contains internal evidence that is of interest to folklorists and local historians; the topographical remarks and recording in Irish of a series of ‘curses’ provides evidence of Irish nomenclature and toponymy. Elements of the folktale contain more than a kernel of folklorist interest, augmenting the already wide scope of recorded folklore for Co. Clare. For example, Cowclohy field in the folktale was recorded in the mid-1930s on the initiative of Patrick McCormack, school principal of Stonehall National School in Co. Clare, and its association with an ancient convent was recalled.²¹ The folktale is also valuable in identifying local families of note and, approached with the usual caveats, the curses share some similarity with another folktale recorded by John O’Donovan in 1839. The survival of this folktale and its antiquity places it as a unique contribution in the folklore of Co. Clare and merits examination.

The purpose of this article is to glean the historical context and chief themes of the folktale. The article begins by discussing the historical link to the McInerheney (Mac an Oirchinnigh) lineage of Newmarket-on-Fergus. This section explores the references to the Augustinian convent at Killone and suggests a possible association between the folktale and Castlekeale, a ruined ‘hall-house’ of the McClancy (Mac Fhlannchadha) brehon lineage in Ballysallagh West. The second section includes a commentary on the text and evaluates the rich Irish used in compiling the curses and the similarity displayed between this and other folktales. The final section touches on Thomas McInerheney, the chief target of Caitlin’s curses, and identifies a possible historical link to Tomás Mac an Oirchinnigh, a fifteenth-century sept-head of Clann an Oirchinnigh. Tomás appears in a Gaelic genealogy from c.1588.²² The article concludes that elements of Connor Ryan’s folktale may have a historical basis despite its disjointed form.

It is hoped that the publication, in full, of this hitherto unpublished folktale furthers the study of Co. Clare’s rich folklore. The paper also provides a translation of the Irish curses. The purpose of publishing this folktale is to demonstrate the utility of folktales as a useful source in terms of local nomenclature and historical themes; all this despite difficulties concerning historical evidence and integrity of orally-transmitted material. The historical context given below and exploration of the chief themes benefits from an article by Máire Ní Ghrúagáin of Kilnasoolagh, Co. Clare, that first referred to the little known folktale and cogently noted that the ‘manuscript has been little studied to date’.²³

¹⁹ Generally people were illiterate in Irish as most learning was oral and books in Irish almost totally unavailable. This led to a paradox where Irish was the medium for communication but people who were literate were literate only in English. Brian Ó Dálaigh, “‘Poet of a Single Poem’”, Brian Merriman (c.1749-1805), in Ciarán Ó Murchadha (ed.), *County Clare Studies* (Ennis, 2000) pp 101-31:113.

²⁰ On the reliability of Gaelic genealogies see Kenneth Nicholls, ‘The Irish Genealogies: Their Value and Defects’, *The Irish Genealogist*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1975) pp 256-61.

²¹ Dúchas na Sionna, *Béaloideas: Baile na Cloiche: Contae an Chláir*, [Stonehall National School Folklore Records 1937], The Heritage Council, [Extracts from Schools’ Folklore Manuscript No.599], 2009, p.56.

²² See RIA MS 23.H.22 p.11 and R.W Twigge, *Materials for a History of Clann Cuilein*, Add MS 39266, Twigge Collection, p. 315 & p. 317. Twigge records that RIA MS 23.H.22 was ‘transcribed in 1803 by Peter O’Connell [Peadar Ó Conaill] from the Roll written by Maolin og Mac Bruaideadha in the year A.D. 1588’.

²³ Máire Ní Ghrúagáin, ‘The Fair Green Monument’, *Tradraí* (2008) p. 14.

Historical Context

The corpus of folklore collected by the Irish Folklore Commission in the 1930s and 1940s relates primarily to the twentieth and mid-late nineteenth century. Older folklore accounts are few and generally confined to manuscript writings and miscellaneous recordings by antiquarians. Exceptionally, the Ordnance Survey carried out by Eugene O'Curry, a native of Clare, and John Donovan in 1839 expounded much locally derived information. As a consequence much local history is based on the exertions of these two scholars, including later works such as James Frost's 1893 *The History and Topography of the Co of Clare*.²⁴

The compiling, at a comparatively early date, of a folktale by a local man skilled in Irish and English credits Connor Ryan's writing as a unique contribution amongst Co. Clare's folklore. That the folktale was recorded prior to the Celtic Revival in the mid-nineteenth century and at a time when the collection of folklore was seldom of antiquarian interest is of relevance in establishing its credibility and authenticity. Equally, the fact that this folktale is found amongst the private collection of Sir Lucius O'Brien further adds to its reliability. Moreover, the folktale is of interest as it comprises seven 'curses' on the head branches of the McInerhenny (Mac an Oirchinnigh) and O'Brien (Ó Briain) families in Irish (*cló Gaelach*). The remainder of the handwritten text is in English with Irish script used for place-names and surnames.

While the origin of the tale is obscure, Connor Ryan's introductory remarks suggest that it was previously copied and circulated by 'Miss Wilson'. A 'Miss Wilson' is recorded in the Tithe Applotment Books in October 1825 as residing at 'Cappa[gh]' North, a townland adjacent to Sixmilebridge. In addition, she occupied land nearby at 'Ballyarrilla' and 'Lisnavinana'.²⁵ The Wilsons of Sixmilebridge were originally an English planter family who served as land agents to the O'Briens of Dromoland.²⁶ This indicates that the tale was in local circulation in Sixmilebridge, probably in the guise of an older version which was subsequently transcribed by Connor Ryan.

A study of the internal evidence indicates that while the tale probably draws from surviving folk memory from the eighteenth century and earlier, it is corrupt in its form. There are specific historical associations in the text which can be explored for their factual basis. These include references to 'Coiradh Chaitlín' (*Coradh Chaitlín*, 'weir of Caitlín'), the McInerhenny family of *Tradraighe* district, and ecclesiastical links between the Augustinian convent at Killone and Ballysheen in Kilfinaghta parish (Sixmilebridge). There are also strong associations to Cowlclohy field in Kilnasoolagh parish.

Caitlín: patroness of Newmarket-on-Fergus

The text of the tale focuses on Caitlín, a holy woman associated with the parishes of *Tradraighe*, and her petitioning two landholders to build a church on their lands. The placement of Caitlín as a contemporary to Cormac, Archbishop of Cashel (d.908) and King of Munster, is probably to invent a historic context and link her to a tradition of local saints.²⁷ In the pre-Norman period local saints founded a succession of ecclesiastical

²⁴ James Frost, *The History and Topography of the Co. of Clare* (1893 (reprint, Dublin, 1973).

²⁵ Tithe Applotment Books, Kilfinaghta parish, October 1825.

²⁶ For an early reference to the name see Ralph Wilson's deed from 1659 for the lands of Knappoge. The earliest reference to the family occurring in Sixmilebridge is contained in a deed of conveyance dated January 1684 to a lease on tenements in Sixmilebridge for Richard Wilson. Richard served as a land agent for Sir Donough O'Brien. See *Inchiquin Papers*, Collection List 143, NLI, p. 594 & p. 596 and p. 146 for a reference to Richard as Sir Donough O'Brien's agent in the 1690s.

²⁷ Several local saints are attributed with establishing early church sites in Clare and were subsequently venerated in local tradition. These include St Conaire who flourished c.500 and a contemporary of St Senan of Iniscathaigh (Scattery Island)

sites in *Tradraighe*, including Tomfinlough (c.500s), Clonloghan (c.900s) and Kilconry (c.500s).²⁸ The folktale ascribes the name of Newmarket-on-Fergus village to Caitlín - ‘*Coiradh Chaitrin*’ - supposed patroness of Kilnasoolagh and Kilfintinan parishes and two obscure church sites: Templemartin and Templecatherine.²⁹ The folktale’s strong connection between Caitlín and Sixmilebridge is noteworthy and suggests a local origin for the folktale. In like manner, the implicit links to Killone convent are notable and warrant further explanation.

The folktale refers to Caitlín residing at Ballysheen (*Baile Oisín*, homestead of Oisín) in her youth and old age. Ballysheen and the adjoining townland of Sooreeny (*Siúríní*, little sisters) paid a rectorial tithe of the land to Killone convent prior to its dissolution in the 1543.³⁰ While the convent at Killone is not mentioned outright, the description of Caitlín as *caileach* (nun or holy woman) and the placing of curses on the O’Brien family of Killone confirms the connection. It can be surmised that the folktale represents a land dispute of late medieval antiquity - possibly fifteenth century - between the nuns at Killone³¹ and the landholding branches of the McInerhney and O’Brien families in the vicinity of Newmarket-on-Fergus.

The Irish name for Newmarket-on-Fergus is *Coradh Chaitlín*; a point not missed by John O’Donovan and Eugene Curry who cite the reference in the fourteenth century *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh* saga-text to *Coradh Cille Subhalaighe* as the old name of Newmarket-on-Fergus district.³² It is generally understood that *Coradh* pertains to the ‘weir’ or crossing point of a stream and could have a connection to the water that flows out of Lough Gash, nearby Kilnasoolagh church.³³

Kilnasoolagh itself may be derived from this stream - *Cill Átha na Súileach*, the church of the bubbling stream.³⁴ The Irish *Coradh Chaitlín* is first recorded amongst the

and who is credited with founding Kilconry church. St. Findchu (a female saint and daughter of Baoth, *inghin baoth*) was the reputed founder of Killinaboy (*Cill Inghin Baoith*). Aside from the reference to Caitlín as the patroness of *Coradh Chaitlín*, there are no other references to a ‘St Caitlín’ as a founder of other Clare churches. For a list of early medieval patrons and church builders in Co. Clare see T. J. Westropp, ‘The Churches of Co. Clare’, *PRIA*, vi, 3rd series, (1900) pp 100-76:106-11.

²⁸ On the early foundations of ecclesiastical sites in *Tradraighe* see 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.

²⁹ The folktale mentions that Templemartin was located on the Limerick road near Sixmilebridge and that Templecatherine was located on the spot of the Protestant church near the green in Sixmilebridge.

³⁰ On the grant of Killone Abbey with its appurtenances, tithes and lands to Murrough O’Brien, Earl of Thomond, see O’Donovan & Curry, *The antiquities of Co Clare*, parish of Killone. They reproduce the wording of the original inquisition which sets out part of the Abbey’s tithe-land ‘...two parts of the tithes of two quarters of land near the Noulet (?) of Awne O’Garna in Ballyussin’. This is a garbled rendering of the Owengarne River (*Abhainn Ó gCearnaigh*) which runs between Ballysheen (*Baile Oisín*) and Sooreeny (*Siúríní*), north of Sixmilebridge. Also see NLI MS 14371: Earl of Inchiquin [1720] for the parishes that paid tithes to Killone: viz Killone, Clondagad, Killofin, Kilfiddane, Kilchreest, Kilmihill, Kilrush, Kilfinaghta, Drumcliff, Kildysert, and Clare Abbey which paid tithes from certain quarters. In Kilfinaghta parish, for example, Ballysheen paid three ploughlands and a half, a typical amount paid in the diocese of Killaloe. My thanks to Brian Ó Dálaigh for this reference.

³¹ On the Augustine nunnery at Killone see Michael MacMahon, ‘The Charter of Clare Abbey and the Augustinian “Province” in Co. Clare’, *The Other Clare*, vol. 17 (1993) pp 21-7. On abbess Renalda Ní Bhriain, whose last will and testament has been preserved amongst the Ormond Deeds and who served as abbess of Killone in 1510, see Brian Ó Dálaigh, ‘Mistress, Mother and Abbess: Renalda Ní Bhriain (c.1447-1510)’, *NMAJ*, vol. xxxii (1990) pp 50-63.

³² It is translated by Standish O’Grady as ‘Kilnasula’s causeway’. Sean Mac Ruaidhri Mac Craith, *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh: The Triumphs of Turlough*, ed. Standish Hayes O’Grady (London, 1929) vol. ii, p. 124 [viz. 1318].

³³ According to the folklore collection of the 1930s, Lough Gash was known as Sughloch and the stream that flows into it the Sruthán. Nearby to where the Sruthán stream crosses the old road called Bóthar Eoin, local folklore identified it as Catherine’s weir and in the vicinity was the holy well known as Tober Coradh Chaitlín. Locally, a story was told that Catherine’s husband Eoin collected tolls beyond the bridge of Newmarket-on-Fergus, hence Bóthar Eoin (Eoin’s road). *Dúchas na Sionna*, pp 67-69.

³⁴ The earliest reference to Kilnasoolagh can be found in the Papal Registers for the year 1256 when it was referred to as ‘Kelluonasulech’. 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.

Petworth House documents in 1619. Found amongst documents collective titled “Tibbott Ricard Confession in 1619—touching my L[or]ds right to lands out of his possession about Belahinan”, it is recorded that “the half-quarter of Corra Kattelin” was then in the possession of John Clanchy.³⁵ Subsequent recordings of *Coradh Chaitlín* include in a deed of feoffment in 1672 of Henry Cooper, gent., of Castlekeale (son of Máire Ruadh) and rendered as ‘Corrow Catlin’.³⁶ The 1659 ‘Census’ mentions a ‘Corraethelin’ situated in Tomfinlough parish, though its population is given at only nine head of households, indicating a small settlement not commensurate with that of a market village.³⁷ In 1695 Sir Donogh O’Brien was granted the patent to hold fairs and a market at ‘Carrocattlen’.³⁸ It is interesting that the village’s first patent is recorded under its Irish name as two years later it was first recorded as ‘Newmarket’ and later known as ‘Newmarket-on-Fergus’, despite not being on the Fergus but on a stream which flows into the Fergus estuary.³⁹ In eighteenth-century documents it was also referred to as Boherone (*Bóthar Eoin*, Road of Eoin/St John).⁴⁰

The folktale recounts that Caitlín desired to build a church at ‘Cowlclohy’, a field to the east of Shepperton House at Ballysallagh West.⁴¹ According to Máire Ní Ghrugáin, a resident of Kilnasoolagh, the field is still locally known as ‘Cowlclogher’.⁴² It may be no coincidence that the folktale refers to Tomas McInerheney building a house at Cowlclohy (*Cabhail an Clochair*, convent ruin)⁴³ in Ballysallagh West. There are ruins at Ballysallagh West (*An Baile Salach*, the muddy townland) of a fortified ‘hall-house’ known as Castlekeale (*An Caisleán Caol*, the narrow castle).⁴⁴ This structure served as a residence of the Mac Fhlannchadha brehon lineage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴⁵ Later it served a residence of John Cooper, husband of local notable Máire

³⁵ Petworth House Archives, West Sussex Record Office, Chichester, “Tibbott Ricard Confession in 1619—touching my L[or]ds right to lands out of his possession about Belahinan”, MS C.13.35. This reference reads: ‘half quarter of Urrlin[?] and the half quarter of Corra Kattelin, the one in the possession of John Clanchy and other[?] in the possession of Donogh Clanchy...his heirs and for and by gift, from Moretagh mcConor Clanchy, and Conor oge Clanchy.’

³⁶ The place-name is again referred to in a deed dated 17 November 1680 as ‘Carrowcallin’ and in the vicinity of Dromoland and Rathfolanmore. John Ainsworth (ed.), *The Inquisition Manuscripts* (Dublin, 1961) p. 372 & p. 386 (No.1142 & 1187).

³⁷ Séamus Pender (ed.), *A Census of Ireland Circa 1659* (Dublin, 1939) p. 167.

³⁸ *British Parliamentary Paper Report of the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the state of fairs and markets in Ireland*, H.C. 1852-3 (1673), xli, 79, pp 65-9.

³⁹ Brian Ó Dálaigh, ‘History of Urban Origins and Village Formation in County Clare’, in Lynch & Nugent (eds), *Clare: History and Society* pp105-35:117.

⁴⁰ In 1711 in a rent roll of Henry O’Brien, Earl of Thomond, the denomination was recorded as “Boherone als [ie alias] Newmarket and Bredagh 52:3:16 acres”, suggesting close proximity to the village of Newmarket-on-Fergus, ‘A rent roll of the estate of the Rt. Hon. Henry Earl of Thomond together with the sub-denominations in each lease and estimation of the value thereof. Delivered to the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Thomond, Anno 1711’, Petworth House Archives, Chichester, MS 1707.

⁴¹ Shepperton House was a large eighteenth-century estate house of the Fitzgerald family of Carrigoran.

⁴² A point attested by local landowner, Joe McMahon, who kindly showed me the remains of the field.

⁴³ An alternative translation of this is ‘the bare walls of a stone structure’. See Patrick Dinneen, *Irish-English Dictionary* (Dublin, 1927) p. 143, p. 207.

⁴⁴ Castlekeale must have comprised a nucleated settlement as it was recorded on the 1708 map by Henry Pratt, *Tabula Hiberniae Novissima et Emendatissima*, in abbreviated form as ‘C.Keil’. Other settlements nearby that were recorded include Newmarket, Stonehall, Dromoland and Ralahine. British Library Maps, K.Top.51.18.11.2.Tab [Copperplate engraving],1708.

⁴⁵ See Martin Breen, ‘A 1570 List of Castles in County Clare’, *NMAJ*, vol. xxxvi (1995) pp 130-8 where Castlekeale is referred to as ‘Ballisallagh’ and occupied by ‘Conoghor oig mac Clanchie, a brehon’. Also see a Chancery Bill from c.1623 which relates to the inheritance of the Mac Fhlannchadha lineage of the “castle, town and lands of Castlekeale”. *Chancery Bills: Survivals from pre-1922 Collection*, K (undated Bills). No.11, National Archives of Ireland.

Ruadh, before falling into ruin in the nineteenth century.⁴⁶ Castlekeale, noteworthy for its narrow stone structure within a large bawn and possible multi-story tower,⁴⁷ situated adjacent to the McNerheney patrimonial lands at Ballysallagh East.

The proximity of Cowlclohy field to Castlekeale in Ballysallagh West, and the adjacent McNerheney lands at Ballysallagh East, anchors the folklore to a specific geographical locus. From this perspective, it could be suggested that the folktale links the ruins of Castlekeale to the unfinished 'house' built by Thomas McNerheney at Cowlclohy field. The remains of Castlekeale resemble that of a long narrow stone-house without a roof. Circumstantial evidence points to a link between Thomas McNerheney of the folktale and target of Caitlín's curses and Tomás Mac an Oirchinnigh, a castle builder of the fifteenth century. This point is discussed later in the paper.

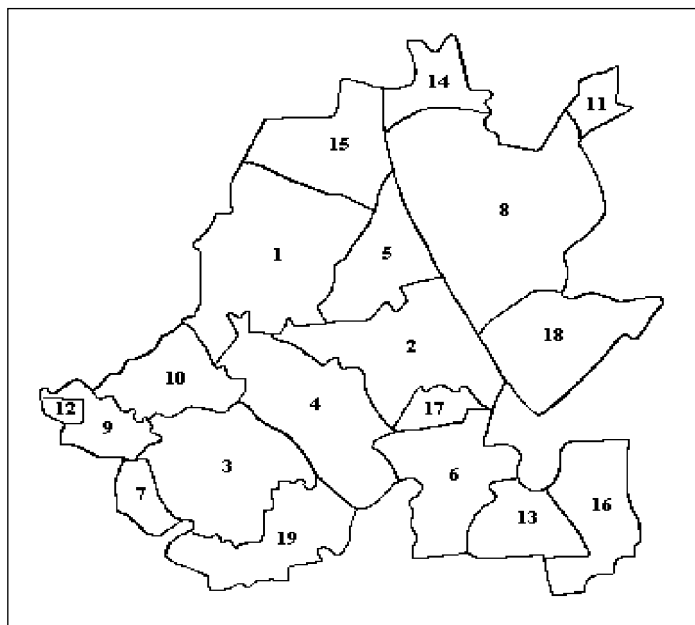


Fig. 1. Kilnasoolagh Parish, Co. Clare.

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|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| 1. Ballygirreen | 6. Carrigoran | 11. Kilkieran | 16. Lisduff |
| 2. Ballynacragga | 7. Corkanacknockaun | 12. Knockmurrageha | 17. Kilnasoolagh |
| 3. Ballysallagh East | 8. Dromoland | 13. Knocksaggart | 18. Rathfolan |
| 4. Ballysallagh West | 9. Ing East | 14. Latoon North | 19. Trennahow |
| 5. Ballyconneely | 10. Ing West | 15. Latoon South | |

⁴⁶ In January 2000 Martin Breen and Ristéard Ua Cróinín surveyed the ruins of Castlekeale at Ballysallagh West that formed part of a late-medieval complex which comprised a large square bawn. The 'long-house' structure measured 32m long and 8.4m wide and the ruined vaults suggest that there may have been a central tower. See Martin Breen & Ristéard Ua Cróinín, 'Some Recently Located Tower-house Sites', *The Other Clare*, vol. 24 (2000) pp 5-9:7-8. Also see Hugh Weir, *Historical Genealogical Architectural Notes on Some Houses of Clare* (Whitegate, 1986) p. 67.

⁴⁷ See the sketch in the Edenvale Castle Survey in Brian Ó Dálaigh, Martin Breen & Ristéard Ua Cróinín, 'The Edenvale Castle Survey of Co. Clare 1671-79', *NMAJ*, vol. 45 (2005) pp 33-49:48. This is the only recording of Castlekeale having a tower structure.

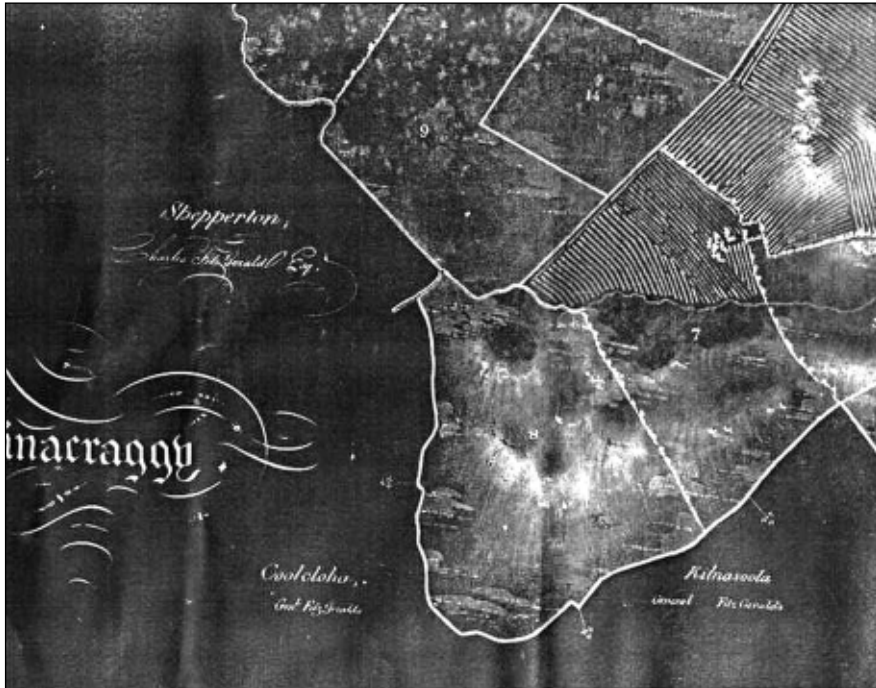


Fig. 2. Section of 1828 Map of the estates of Sir Edward O'Brien.

The earliest reference to 'Cowlclogher' that can be identified appears in an 1828 map by Michael Logan of Galway. The map, which surveyed the estates of Sir Edward O'Brien Bart., forms part of the map collection of the Inchiquin Manuscripts.⁴⁸ It identifies 'Coolcloha' field as a large sub-denomination of Ballysallagh West bounded by Shepperton House, the residence of Charles Fitzgerald Esq. to the west, and Kilnasoolagh to the east. This is in proximity to the modern Limerick-Ennis motorway, which underpasses a local road about 500 meters to the west of Kilnasoolagh church. The overpass marks the general location of 'Cowlclogher' field and is still known locally. In the 1828 map by Michael Logan 'Coolcloha' is recorded in the southwest corner, broadly consistent with the location of the modern-day smaller field that is pointed out as 'Cowlclogher'.

McInerheney family of Kilnasoolagh parish

Historical sources indicate the McInerheney (Mac an Oirchinnigh) sept-estate comprised Ballysallagh East, Carrigoran, Corkanacknockaun and Clonconnell in Kilnasoolagh parish.⁴⁹ Additional lands belonged to the sept at Clonloghan, Kilmaleery, Doorra and Templemaley parishes, with a sizable demesne at Ballykilty in Quin parish.⁵⁰ As an

⁴⁸ Inchiquin Papers, MS 21 F. 137, NLI [1828–7 sheets]. The author thanks Máire Ní Ghruagáin for procuring the section of the map reproduced here.

⁴⁹ R. Simington, *Books of Survey and Distribution* (Dublin, 1949) pp 157-60.

⁵⁰ Clonloghan parish included a cluster of McInerheney freeholders recorded at Lisconnor and Caherteige in 1641 (457 statute acres). Other lands identified in 1641 include Ardbraughan in Kilmaleery parish (40 statute acres), Ballykilty in Quin parish (600 statute acres) Derrie and Magherly in Templemaley parish (211 statute acres) and Kilnahon (part of Knocklatter [sic] Knockslattery) in Doorra parish (222 acres). *Ibid.*, pp 126, 130-131, 148, 163, 169, 171.

erenagh sept (*airchinneach*, steward of church lands) the McInerheney's were an important vassal lineage of the ruling Mac Conmara *Fionn*.⁵¹ Surviving documentation suggests that the McInerheney's still held ecclesiastical land in Kilnasoolagh parish up to 1617, but whether they were recognized as an erenagh sept at that late date is uncertain.⁵²

Circumstantial evidence points to the McInerheney's being based in the vicinity of Ballysallagh in Kilnasoolagh parish since at least c.1400.⁵³ Land transactions among McInerheney's there occur up until 1655.⁵⁴ It is not known when these lands were initially occupied by them, but the conventional historical view is that the Mac Conmara re-settled *Tradraighe* with allied septs in the wake of the collapse of De Clare's Norman colony in 1318.⁵⁵

As the chief patrimony of the McInerheney's, Ballysallagh is divided into east and west. In 1586 Ballysallagh East was known locally as 'Ballysallagh McEnehrine' presumably to differentiate it from the western part of the townland occupied by the McClancy (Mac Fhlannchadha) brehon lineage.⁵⁶ Ballysallagh West comprised the McClancy estate and fortified residence of Castlekeale, but their principal residence was located nearby at Urlanmore (*An Urlann Mhór*, large open green) tower-house.⁵⁷

The fifteenth-century Papal Letters and petitions known as *Regesta Supplicationum* record McInerheney clerics being appointed to the vicarages of Kilnasoolagh, Kilmaleery, Kilfintanan, Clonloghan and Bunratty and to the rectories of Quin, Bunratty, Drumline, Tymorlogyg and *Ui Chormaic*.⁵⁸ McInerheney clerics are first recorded in the published Papal Registers in 1411,⁵⁹ with clerics of the name described as the 'offspring

⁵¹ Literally 'son of the *airchinneach*'. The Irish ecclesiastical office of *airchinneach*, generally anglicized 'erenagh', refers to a steward of church lands and is typically associated with the pre-reform twelfth century Irish church. On the surname see Luke McInerney, 'Land and Lineage: The McEnehrins of Ballysallagh in the Sixteenth Century', *NMAJ*, vol. 49 (2009) pp 1-26 and idem, 'Survey of the McInerney Sept of Thomond: Part I', *The Other Clare*, vol. 31 (2007) pp 67-72 and Part II *The Other Clare*, vol. 32 (2008) pp 27-35.

⁵² 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, NLI 1936, pp 11-12. The original manuscript can be accessed at the library of the Representative Church Body, Dublin [Ms D.14/1].

⁵³ Luke McInerney, 'Clerics and Clansmen: The Vicarages and Rectories of *Tradraighe* in the Fifteenth Century', *NMAJ*, vol. 48 (2008) pp 1-21:10.

⁵⁴ In 1655 'Cunarra McInerhiny' of Ballysallagh (along with Thomas Field) entered into a lease with Daniel McNamara of Ballynacragga, Ainsworth (ed.), *Inchiquin Manuscripts*, No.1080, p. 353.

⁵⁵ Frost, *History and Topography Co. Clare*, p. 182. See the 1321 *Inquisition Post Mortem* taken on the death of Thomas de Clare which states the 'lands were of the lordship are waste and out of cultivation for the past three years; neither are there any free tenants or others dwelling in Thomond save only the Irishmen who dominate therein, with the exception of a few dwellers in the town'. George U. Macnamara, 'Bunratty, Co. Clare', *Journal of the North Munster Archaeological Society*, vol. iii, no. 4 (1915) pp 220-86:249.

⁵⁶ Twigg, *Materials for a History of Clann Cuilein*, Add MS 39260 pp 180-6:182. The 1586 inquisition into the lands of Seán Mac Conmara, Lord of West *Clann Chuiléin*, records Ballysallagh West owing 7s 10d, while 'Ballysallagh McEnehrine' owed 6s 8d. For a discussion on this see Luke McInerney, 'The West *Clann Chuiléin* Lordship in 1586: Evidence from a Forgotten Inquisition', *NMAJ*, vol. 48 (2008) pp 33-62:43 & 53.

⁵⁷ The 1641 *Books of Survey and Distribution*, p. 159 divide Ballysallagh West into four plough-lands, ie. 'Trincastlan', 'Ranaghan', 'Trin McMikle' and 'Chaghre Monghan'. The first division refers to one-third of the *caisleán* – or castle – and refers to the fields around Castlekeale. Castlekeale (Ballysallagh West) and Urlanmore were recorded as Mac Fhlannchadha possessions in 1570. See Martin Breen, 'A 1570 List of Castles in Co. Clare', *NMAJ*, vol. xxxvi (1995) pp 130-8:133.

⁵⁸ See McInerney, 'Vicarages and Rectories of *Tradraighe*'. On the vicarages and rectories of Killaloe diocese see K.W. Nicholls, 'Rectory, Vicarage and Parish in the Western Irish Dioceses', *JRS&I*, vol. 101 (1971) pp 53-84.

⁵⁹ *Papal Letters*, Vol. VI, pp 256-7; McInerney, 'Vicarages and Rectories of *Tradraighe*', pp 10-12. Also see the petitions from the same cleric, Matheus Macemayrkyny, for 1419 in *ASV Regestum Supplicationum* 129f. 63 and *ASV Regestum Supplicationum* 131, 34-34v, excerpted and published in Special List 43, NLI.

of a noble lineage' (*de nobili genere procreatus existit*).⁶⁰ The Papal Letters reveal that the McInerheney sept supplied a steady stream of clerics to local benefices; this is not surprising considering that the McInerheney sept were an established landholding sept.

Records demonstrate an enduring medieval connection with the McInerheney family and Ballysallagh in Kilnasoolagh parish. This suggests a historic basis to the folktale. That Caitlín is described as *caileach* with its connotations of holy-women or a nun, and the focus on Cowlclohy field which was contiguous to the McInerheney sept-estate, is probably no coincidence. Interestingly, the epitaph *caileach* is preserved in the nomenclature of the local landscape; Ballynacally in the parish of Kilchreest derives from *Baile na Cailí*, (townland of the nuns) and paid a tithe to Killone convent.⁶¹

Taken together these points suggest an association, albeit somewhat confused, between the nuns at Killone and the roofless ruin of Castlekeale in Ballysallagh West. There is also an association with the McInerheney ecclesiastical connection at Kilnasoolagh parish and their hereditary estate at Ballysallagh and the adjacent townland of Treannahow (*Triann na hAbhainn*, the third by the river). Stripped down to its basic element these references suggest an old historic association with the McInerheney sept and their ecclesiastical origins.

While only circumstantial, internal evidence in the folktale intimates a link between Caitlín and the O'Brien-controlled Killone convent, and their rectorial possessions in the vicinity of Sixmilebridge (ie. Ballysheen and Sooreeny). The folktale also infers an ecclesiastical link with lands in Kilnasoolagh parish and the McInerheney family, as well as the presence of a narrow roofless ruin that, in the author's opinion, is perhaps confused with the present ruins of Castlekeale.⁶² This fortified house of the Mac Fhlannchadha situates in the same townland as Cowlclohy field. These points lend credence to the suggestion that the folktale contains elements of historical fact, despite being corrupted and disjointed in its historiography.

Commentary on the Text

The folktale is handwritten chiefly in English with Irish being the language of the seven 'curses'. Written in *Cló Gaelach* the curses contain topographical and historical themes from which we can distill useful information. Connor Ryan recorded the poem in 1825 from a copy of the tale provided by a local woman, Miss Wilson. This fact hints at the likelihood that the folktale was in local circulation. The reference to Shepperton House, a late eighteenth century 'big house' of the Fitzgeralds, alludes to eighteenth century elements in the folktale. The placement of the McInerheney lands in the vicinity of Ballysallagh and Treannahow and their status as a landholding lineage is vindicated in the historical record prior to the mid-seventeenth century, testifying to the accuracy of folk-memory.⁶³

⁶⁰ Belonging to a landed dominant lineage of 'noble' status conferred legitimacy on a cleric and the awarding of benefices. See papal mandates dated 1443 and 1483 in *Papal Letters Vol. VIII*, p. 131 and *Vol. IX* pp 353-4. Also see *ASV Regestum Supplicationum* 129f. 63. An earlier petition is recorded under the Papal Letters of Clement VII of Avignon. This petition relates to 'Dermicus Macenkargyd' (Diarmaid Mac an Oirchinnigh) who held the perpetual vicarage of 'Kylomsulach' (Kilnasoolagh) and rectory of *Ui Chormaic* (parishes of Drumcliff and Kilmaley) in 1382, but was to yield the latter to a Mac Craith cleric. See Charles Burns, 'Papal Letters of Clement VII of Avignon (1378-94) relating to Ireland and England', *Collectanea Hibernica*, no. 24 (1982) pp 7-44:29. The holding of Kilnasoolagh vicarage confirms this cleric, despite the mangled surname, as a kinsman of the McInerheney sept (Clann an Oirchinnigh) of Kilnasoolagh.

⁶¹ See NLI MS 14371.

⁶² The folktale mentions that after Thomas choked on his food during a feast with the nobility of Thomond, not a stone was laid on his newly built house and that its ruins are 'to be seen to this day between Newmarket on Fergus and Shepperton'. The ruins of Castlekeale are marked on the Ordnance Survey maps and it is the only visible ruined 'house' structure that can be identified in the vicinity of Shepperton.

Of particular interest are the curses of Caitlín on the McNerhenehy and O'Brien family branches. The curses, for the most part, centre on the themes of agricultural wealth and prosperity (or lack of it), sorrow and famine. To this end, they are typical of the repertoire of curses found amongst Irish folktales. Five curses are directed at the McNerhenehy branches of: Coonagh ('*Cuineach*'), Middlethird Cratloe ('*Creatlighe meadhan*'), Knockdurlus ('*Chnoc Duiluis*'),⁶⁴ Smithstown ('*Baile na nGaibhne*') and Teermaclane ('*Tir mac calain*'). Two curses were placed on the O'Brien family of Killone ('*Cileeóin*') and Knockanimana ('*Cnuic na nGiomanách*'). It is significant that the first curse was directed at the '*siol mbriain*' (progeny of the Uí Bhriain) of Killone. It was the ruling lineage of the O'Briens who founded Killone convent in the twelfth century.

It is clear that Connor Ryan was bilingual. However the text was probably in the handwriting of Sir Luicus O'Brien, presumably recopying Ryan's original text into his collection of verse and prose. It is fortunate that an insightful document from 1820 has survived that sheds light on the prevalence of Irish in Co. Clare.⁶⁵ We can deduce that the eastern portion of Co. Clare was bi-lingual as was northwest Co. Tipperary. West of the Fergus River in central Co. Clare, however, the picture changes and Irish was the normal tongue for communication. A large population of monoglot Irish speakers existed from Drumcliffe in central Co. Clare to Rathbourney in northwest Co. Clare, and continued to expand on the back of demographic trends until the famine.⁶⁶ Individual Irish speakers can be identified in 1911 in Kilnasoolagh and adjacent parishes, while at Mooghane, north of Newmarket-on-Fergus, a *Gaeltacht* survived into the 1870s.⁶⁷

We can speculate that the preservation of the curses in Irish in a folktale from Sixmilebridge may infer a general knowledge of Irish amongst the population there; this should not be stressed too much but it is curious that the curses were preserved in Irish. The rhyme and metre of the verses made them easy to recite in Irish and difficult to translate into English. This may attest to the survival of the oldest element in the folktale's writing. The Irish used is corrupt in its form and obscure in parts; suffice to say that this might be the rump survival of a more elaborate poem or satire.

General themes that can be identified from the curses include curses on agricultural wealth and prosperity, sorrow and famine. Such themes are common to other Irish curses in the oral tradition and reflect the powers of the *caileach* or holy-women in the Irish church who exerted power through the threat of curse and satire. These 'powers' are not unlike those found amongst the learned classes of Gaelic Ireland such as the bardic poets whose verses were believed to have the power to wound and kill and who themselves were believed to have powers of divination.⁶⁸ The *caileach* in the Irish tradition has been argued to represent the feminine within what is perceived to be essentially a patriarchal culture.⁶⁹

⁶³ The McNerhenehy estates were largely confiscated during the Cromwellian settlement. On printed primary sources relating to the confiscations see R. Simington, *The Transplantation to Connacht 1654-1658* (Dublin, 1970) and 'The Dispossessed Landowners of Ireland, 1664', *The Irish Genealogist*, vol. 4, no. 4, (1971) pp 275-449.

⁶⁴ Knockdurlus is likely to be 'Knockthurles' ('hill of the fortress') located in Ballymorris townland in Kilfintinan parish. On the identification of Knockdurlus see See Frost, *History and Topography of Co. Clare*, p. 408. Ballymorris and Cratloe are both townlands in Kilfintinan parish.

⁶⁵ See Alf Mac Lochlainn, 'The Irish Language in Clare and North Tipperary, 1820: Bishop Mant's Enquiry', *NMAJ*, vol. xvii (1975) pp 77-82.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 81-2 & pp 78-9.

⁶⁷ *Dúchas na Sionna*, p 13. In the mid-1930s only one Irish speaker remained at Mooghane.

⁶⁸ In a treaty dated 1547 between Manus O'Donnell and his vassal O'Connor of Sligo, the satire of the poets was treated as a sanction equivalent to excommunication, James Carney, *The Irish Bardic Poet* (Dublin, 1967, re-print 1985) p. 12.

⁶⁹ See Gearóid Ó Cruaíoch, *The Book of the Cailleach: Stories of the Wise-Woman Healer* (Cork, 2006) p. 12.

The location of McInerheney and O'Brien family branches set down in the curses is revealing. For example, the first curse directed at the O'Brien family of Killone underscores the connection between Caitlín the *caileach* (or nun) and the Augustinian convent. It also may have resonance due to the fact that Killone was founded by Donal Mór O'Brien in 1189 on lands belonging to the Augustinian monks at Clare Abbey. The convent served as a religious community almost exclusively for female members of the O'Brien household whose stronghold was located two miles away at Clarecastle.⁷⁰ When the convent was dissolved in 1543 the building and lands were granted to Murrrough O'Brien, a descendant of the founder.

The O'Brien connection with Killone continued into the seventeenth century so it is not surprising that the folktale cites a branch of O'Briens at Killone; nonetheless what is surprising is that the family that occupied Newhall House at Killone in the mid-eighteenth century, the MacDonnells, are not mentioned. This curious fact points to a deep historical association with the O'Briens and McInerheney to Killone which survived in folk-memory.

The references in the curses to McInerheney family branches is puzzling because the historical record does not support the presence of landholding branches of the family occupying lands at these locations. The 1641 *Books of Survey and Distribution* and the *Inchiquin Manuscripts* do not record these lands under McInerheney proprietorship. Rather, the patrimonial lands of the McInerheney were clustered around Kilnasoolagh, Kilmaleery and Clonloghan parishes, with other parcels at Quin and Doora parishes.⁷¹ Possibly, the locations of McInerheney branches in the folktale were derived from popular folk-memory that the McInerheney were an important landholding lineage in *Tradraighe* district. Alternatively, the locations given may reflect nineteenth century realities of McInerheney landholding. It is also notable that Teermaclane appears in the seventh curse in relation to a McInerheney family branch there. While evidence does not suggest a pre-1700 connection with McInerheney to this townland, Teermaclane is located in Killone parish and highlights the link to Killone convent in the folktale. In the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries McInerheney were interred at Killone Abbey graveyard, including Joan McInerheney who was buried there in 1758 and Morgan McInerheney in 1793. Matthew McInerheney of Tiremeclane, Newhall, was buried there in 1786 and left a will in 1787.⁷²

The folktale also makes reference to the pseudo-history of the McInerheney. Using the popular form of the name in Irish - Mac an Oirchinn - the folktale recounts how 'Thomas the Talian of Clann Tail, the ancestor of Mac an Oirchinn' occupied the lands from the 'Liberty of Limerick to Teermaclane'. This statement is consistent with historical evidence that the McInerheney were an important landholding lineage in *Tradraighe*, southeast Co. Clare.⁷³ The reference to the McInerheney as being descended from Clann Tail implies that they were of Dál gCais origin.

More intriguing is the reference in the text to the 800 monks at Quin Abbey. This tallies exactly with the dubious statement made by Franciscan Anthony Broudin that a

⁷⁰ Ó Dálaigh, 'Mistress, Mother and Abbess', p. 58.

⁷¹ On a detailed assessment of McInerheney landholding in the mid seventeenth century see McInerney, 'Land and Lineage: The McInerheney of Ballysallagh'.

⁷² See Power, *A History of Clare Abbey and Killone*, p. 40; W.P.W. Phillimore, *Irish Wills: Killaloe and Kilfenora Wills*, vol. 3 (London, 1913).

⁷³ See McInerney, 'The West *Clann Chuiléin* Lordship in 1586'.

monastic school operated at Quin Abbey in c.1640 and which had a population of 800 students before it was disbanded by Cromwellian soldiers in 1651.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, the consistency in the figures here is striking. This could be the case of a pseudo-historical truth influencing the folktale. A similar parallel can be drawn with the reference to Thomas McInerhenny who appears as the main subject in the folktale.

<i>G. dt. an Oirchinnigh (Chloinne Cuilein) ann so t[h]ios</i>	
<i>M. Mathgamain</i>	u
<i>M. Seain</i>	u
<i>M. Con Mara</i>	u
<i>M. Tomais</i>	u
<i>M. Mathgamna</i>	u
<i>M. Donnail</i>	u
<i>M. Lochlainn</i>	u
<i>M. Lorcaim</i>	u
<i>M. Murchadha</i>	u
<i>M. Conchobhair</i>	u
<i>M. Domnachadha i. an tHoir</i>	u
<i>chimeach aguo (Clann an Oirchinnigh)</i>	u
<i>M. Donnail</i>	u
<i>M. Con Mara</i>	u
<i>M. Donnail</i>	u
<i>M. Maanman</i>	u
<i>M. Aodha O'hair &c</i>	u
<i>G. Aile M. an Oirchinnigh:</i>	u
<i>Lochlainn</i>	u
<i>M. Mathgamna</i>	u
<i>M. Lochlainn</i>	u
<i>M. Mathgamna</i>	u
<i>M. Tomais</i>	u
<i>M. Mathgamna</i>	u
<i>M. Donnail</i>	u
<i>M. Lochlainn</i>	u
<i>M. Lorcaim &c</i>	u

c.1588 Genealogical Pedigree⁷⁵

Tomás Mac an Oirchinnigh

The folktale is unique in its recording of Thomas McInerhenny (Tomás Mac an Oirchinnigh). The folktale contains few details about Tomas. However, it mentions Thomas occupied the lands around Cowlclohy field in Ballysallagh West and the adjacent townland of Treannahow. These references accurately recount the historical locus of the Mac an Oirchinnigh sept in Kilnasoolagh parish down to the mid-seventeenth century. Further evidence can be distilled from a genealogy compiled by a hereditary chronicler to the O'Briens, Maoilín Óg Mac Bruaideadha.⁷⁶ According to this pedigree written in c.1588,⁷⁷ the landholding segment of the Mac an Oirchinnigh is set down in lineal form. The forenames in the genealogy can be cross-referenced against other genealogies, including in RIA Ms 23 L.37 whose original exemplar dates from c.1380.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Anthony Bruodin, *Propugnaculum Catholicæ Veritatis, Libri X. Constructum, in Duásque Partes Divisum*, (Prague, 1669) p. 712. This doubtful statement is reminiscent of the assertion that *Cluainramhfhadha* (Clonroad) had 600 scholars and that O'Brien, Prince of Thomond, maintained 350 monks after the arrival of the English, Hugh MacCurtin, *A Brief Discourse in Vindication of the Antiquity of Ireland* (Dublin, 1717) p. 290.

⁷⁵ The title of the pedigree reads: "G. [geinealach] *Mac an Oirchinnigh Chloinne Cuilein ann so t[h]ios*" (Genealogy of the McInerhennys of *Clann Chuiléin* here below). The title of the second pedigree below the line reads: "G. [geinealach] *Aile Mac an Oirchinnigh*" (ie. Other genealogy of the McInerhennys).

⁷⁶ RIA MS 23.H22, p.11.

⁷⁷ The title of the pedigree reads: 'G. [geinealach] *Mac an Oirchinnigh Chloinne Cuilein ann so t[h]ios*'. (Genealogy of the McInerhennys of *Clann Chuiléin* here below). The title of the second pedigree below the line reads: 'G. [geinealach] *Aile Mac an Oirchinnigh*' (ie. Other genealogy of the McInerhennys). According to Twigge this genealogical tract was scribed by the well-known Co. Clare scribe Peter O'Connell (Peadar Ó Conaill) in 1803, *Materials for a History of Clann Cuilein*, Add MS 39266, p. 315 & p. 317.

⁷⁸ See RIA MS 23 L.37 and Nicholls, 'The Irish Genealogies: Their Value and Defects', p. 258.

Tomás Mac an Oirchinnigh appears in the genealogy and, as this writer has discussed elsewhere,⁷⁹ Tomás was the common grandfather of two rival branches of the sept. Tomás' descendants, who clashed over the proprietorship of the sept-estate, can be identified in the sixteenth century *inquisition post mortem* and Chancery Court material.⁸⁰ Their agnatic relationship is accurately recorded in the c.1588 genealogy; it is speculated that this genealogy was produced to support the land claims of the senior branch of the sept.⁸¹

The forename Tomás does not occur in the fifteenth century Mac Conmara or Mac Fhlannchadha (McClancy) genealogies⁸² so its inclusion in the Mac an Oirchinnigh genealogy confers a degree of credibility on the folktale. By deducing from birth-dates given in the *inquisition* material and cross referencing with the c.1588 genealogy, Tomás was probably born c.1460-80.

According to two eighteenth century lists of castle builders, Tomás mac Sheaán Mhic an Oirchinnigh is credited with erecting towerhouses at Dromoland ('*Druim álain*') and Ballyconeely ('*Baile Uí Chonghaile*').⁸³ A second list dated to the nineteenth century credits Seaán Mac an Oirchinnigh as having erected a tower-house at Treannahow ('*Trienna hóighe*' [sic]).⁸⁴ It is unlikely that a tower-house existed at Treannahow as it was not recorded in the 1570 or 1574 list of tower-houses for the 'Barony of Dangan-i-viggin' (Bunratty Lower) and no such remains were found by the Ordnance Survey.⁸⁵ These accounts of castle builders are traditional and should be treated with caution. However, their value lies in the general point that the McInerheney's were responsible for erecting tower-houses in Kilnasoolagh parish and that Tomás son of Seán was responsible for this. Surveys of tower-houses in Co. Clare agree that majority were erected in the fifteenth century.

Taken together these references pinpoint Thomas McInerheney of the folktale to a historical figure of the late fifteenth century. While only circumstantial, the singular usage of the forename Thomas (Tomás) in the Mac an Oirchinnigh pedigrees,⁸⁶ and the absence of the forename in the Mac Conmara and Mac Fhlannchadha pedigrees, supports

⁷⁹ See McInerney, 'Survey of the McInerney Sept of Thomond': Part I & Part II and idem, 'Land and Lineage: The McInerheney's of Ballysallagh'.

⁸⁰ Frost, *History and Topography of Co. Clare*, p. 269 & p. 280. Also see *Chancery Bills: Survivals from pre-1922 Collection*, B. No. 228, National Archives of Ireland.

⁸¹ McInerney, 'Land and Lineage: The McInerheney's of Ballysallagh'.

⁸² See, for example, 'O'Clery Book of Genealogies', ed. Séamus Pender, *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 18 (1951) pp 152-3.

⁸³ Given that the c.1588 genealogy (RIA MS 23.H 22, p.11) record Tomás not as the son of Seán but the son of Mathgamain, a margin of error must be considered. Tomás mac Sheaán Mhic an Oirchinnigh was recorded in two lists: one an unreliable eighteenth-century list by William O'Lionain in Standish Hayes O'Grady's *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum*, and another eighteenth-century list in the O'Gorman papers. See Twigge, *Materials for a History of Clann Cuilein*, Add MS 39262, Vol II (ff. 326), p. 225 and (referenced by Twigge) RIA MS 24.D.10 (*O'Gorman Papers*, 18th century Ms). See also Standish Hayes O'Grady, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum*, Vol.1 (London, 1926) pp 68-75:69-71. The latter source publishes both lists.

⁸⁴ Cited in Standish Hayes O'Grady, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum*, pp 68-75.

⁸⁵ Breen, 'A 1570 List of Castles in Co. Clare', pp 130-8 and R.W. Twigge, 'Edward White's Description of Thomond in 1574', *NMAJ*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1910) pp 75-85.

⁸⁶ For other Mac an Oirchinnigh genealogies see RIA MS 23.N.12, pp 186-7; RIA MS 23 H. 25 p. 84; RIA MS D i 3, f. 74v; RIA MS E iv. 4 (a) f. 28. Also in published form see 'O'Clery Book of Genealogies', *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 18 (1951) p. 153 and a reference to Clann an Oirchinnigh as among the nobles who descended from Caisín (*a quo* Uí Chaisín) in Nollaig Ó Muraile (ed.), *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies*, Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh, Vol. III (Dublin, 2003) p. 693. Also see the reference to 'Macanerhiny, Irish *Mac-anfhairechne*' in Hugh MacCurtin, *A Brief Discourse in Vindication of the Antiquity of Ireland*, p. 106. Mac Curtin must have been in possession of old genealogies, possibly those compiled by the Mac Cruitín or the Mac Bruaideadha historian-chroniclers.

the view that a fifteenth century *ceannfine* of Clann an Oirchinnigh built tower-houses in Kilnasoolagh parish. The folktale's reference to Thomas McInerhenny building a house at Cowlclohy field at Ballysallagh West (possibly confused with Castlekeale) and his occupation of the lands at Treannahow and "almost all the good ground between Limerick and Clare alongside the Shannon", suggests a link to a historical fifteenth-century Tomás Mac an Oirchinnigh. It would not be productive to speculate further about an assumed association in the folk-memory with the historical Tomás; suffice to say that the historical parallels are compelling but the paucity of sources restricts further exploration.

Folktales of Killone

Connor Ryan's folktale has resonance in a tale recorded by John O'Donovan in 1839 for the parish of Killone. According to O'Donovan the Killone Lough opposite the Augustinian convent was believed to be enchanted and that a town existed below the waters to be seen every seven years.⁸⁷ O'Donovan recites another tale that an O'Brien fishing at the lough caught a mermaid and stole her home. A fool in O'Brien's house scolded the mermaid with boiling water, to which she screamed and headed for the lough, not without cursing:

*Filedhan bhradráin on sruith,
File gan fuil gan feoil,
Gur ba mar sin imtheochas siol mBriain,
Na ndeasacha fiadh as Chilleóin.*
[As the return of the salmon from the stream,
A return without blood or flesh,
May such be the departure of the O'Briens,
Like ears of wild corn from Killeoin].⁸⁸

The above folktale, also from the first half of the nineteenth century, has two important themes. First, the analogy of a salmon returning to water heralding the departure of the O'Brien family is also present in the folktale copied by Connor Ryan. Second, the reference to Killone as an O'Brien possession occurs in both folktales. It is possible that both folktales derive from the same source. According to Westropp several variations exist in a similar tale told in 1876 that a mermaid used to swim up a stream that flowed under the cellars of Newhall at Killone in order to steal wine. An O'Brien threw boiling water over her and her blood ran down the stream and reddened the lough and she wailed:

As the mermaid goes on the sea,
So shall the race of O'Briens pass away
Till they leave Killone in wild weeds.⁸⁹

The similarity between these tales and the folktale copied by Connor Ryan in 1825 suggests a shared origin given their focus on the O'Brien gentry of Killone. Indeed the last passage in Connor Ryan's transcribed folktale alludes to this connection, suggesting

⁸⁷ O'Donovan & Curry, *Antiquities of County Clare*, Killone parish

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Westropp, *Folklore of Clare*, chapter 6.

that ‘St Catherine [was] transformed into a mermaid recited and credited by some’. This passage probably refers to corrupt versions of the folktale recited in popular memory in the nineteenth century.

The folktale is unique and probably originated from a historical dispute over land between the McInerheney family and the nuns at Killone. Caitlín, a holy-women or nun, was likely to have been an O’Brien and it is conceivable that the tale has a basis in historical fact in pre-reformation Co. Clare. That a Tomás Mac an Oirchinnigh can be identified as a sept-head of the Mac an Oirchinnigh in the fifteenth century adds further weight to the contention that the folktale comprises some historical fact, albeit confused in its historiography.

Other folktales exist regarding the McInerheney family. For example, a folktale from the Sixmilebridge area recounts that:

In early days, Meihan mac Enerheny, a famous warrior, made the huge fort, or rather hill town, of Moghane as a ‘fighting-ring’ for himself. He would never allow his tribe to go to war until he had himself challenged and defeated all the enemy’s chiefs. He reigned in great esteem from the Fergus to the Owennagarna river. In his fighting-ring he always gave his opponents the choice of the sun and wind, in despite of which he overthrew them all. There was no king, nor soldier, nor monster that he feared to fight. His admiring tribe gave him a gold-embroidered cap, and the name of Oircheannach (Golden Head), and he died unconquered.⁹⁰

Westropp commented that the tale was not heard in the local area, but it was likely to be late though perhaps genuine.⁹¹

Concluding Remarks

The folktale recorded by Connor Ryan in 1825 is unique in several ways. It combines elements of Irish and English and appears to have been in local circulation, thus augmenting its authenticity. While it can be analysed for its pseudo-historical basis, this does not suggest that the tale about Caitlín wanting to found a church on McInerheney lands is factually accurate. Rather, the fact that implicit references link Caitlín to Killone convent probably places her as a member of the ruling O’Brien lineage, inferring some legitimate historical underpinning to the folktale.

Caitlín’s dispute perhaps relates to a land dispute between the McInerheney family of Kilnasoolagh parish and Killone convent. Killone convent had landed possessions throughout *Tradraighe*, including Ballysheen near Sixmilebridge. Reading between the lines we can deduce that the folktale links the landholding branch of the McInerheney sept to the ecclesiastical economy. This point squares with the historical record that the McInerheney family were associated with the vicarages of Kilnasoolagh and nearby Kilmaleery parishes since at least 1411, and possessed ecclesiastical lands at Kilnasoolagh down to the seventeenth century. While only circumstantial, such evidence confers credibility on the folktale and is of interest on account of the historical ecclesiastical links between the McInerheney family and Killone convent. It is also of interest to the general reader that there is a field in Ballysallagh West still known locally as ‘Cowlclogher’.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 119. On a similar tale involving a suit of golden amour see Michael Hogan’s poem ‘Warrior Exiles: A Legend of the Clan MacInerney’, in Michael Hogan, *Lays and Legends of Thomond*, (reprint, Limerick, 1999) p. 290.

⁹¹ Westropp, *Folklore of Clare*, p.119. The translation of ‘oircheannach’ (sic *airchinneach*) as ‘golden head’ is erroneous as it confuses the Irish word *óir* (gold) with *air* (noble). The latter is found in *airchinneach* and denotes steward of church lands and is the correct origin of Mac an Oirchinnigh.

The folktale's mix of topographical information (Shepperton House, Cowlclohy field, Treannahow, etc) and reference to Thomas McInerhenehy, Quin Friary and the ruins of Thomas' house between Shepperton and Newmarket (Castlekeale?) provide a rich assortment of detail for the folklorist. It can operate as a guide to the salience of oral tradition and its continuity into the nineteenth century. Whatever the historical truth behind the folktale, it has value as a recording of the oral tradition in pre-famine Ireland. This paper has attempted to provide a general account of the folktale's historical motifs and themes and a translation of Caitlín's curses with minor editing.⁹² However, further work is needed to locate the folktale in its contemporary context and to provide detailed textual commentary. Local historians and folklore enthusiasts are in debt to Connor Ryan's foresight to commit this tale to writing and to heed his advice to protect the tale for posterity.

Manuscript G990 No 4 National Library of Ireland

From a Writing by Connor Ryan of Sixmilebridge

This copy handed over to me by Miss Wilson was in error as to its author being a mermaid and the composition much corrupted by unskilful transcribers in every age.

The real author was Catherine patroness of Kilfintinan, Templemartin, Templecatherine, Kilnasoola, Newmarket on Fergus which last place bears her name in the Irish language to this day *Coiradh Chaitrin*. This Catherine in her youth and old age dwelling in Ballysheen Church, then a Bishop's See united with Killaloe in the 6th century at the instance of Colgan, Bishop of Ibleity, an aged lady of great devotion, piety and sanctity.

Note Kilfintinan is a small church at the foot of Gallows Hill formerly a place of rest between Munster and Quin - Templemartin the ruins of a small church on the Limerick road near Sixmilebridge - Templecatherine in Sixmilebridge where now stands the Protestant Church and across from that to the new chapel on the green.

This Catherine was contemporary with Holy Cormac son of Cullinane archbishop of Cashel and King of Munster who was a prince, a prelate, a prophet, a priest and a poet. When the descendants of Olliol Olum were monarchs of Ireland and the dynasties or younger branches of that line filling and occupying the royal palaces of the north Munster consisting of Bunratty, Ennistymon, Killone, Carrick O Gwinnil [Carrickogunnell] etc, etc.

Saint Catherine being named in a dream to build a church and dedicate it to St Patrick, pitched on and thought to build it on the lands of Trinahow or *Trian na hábhadh* and the fat lands of *Tarmuín Luimnach* or the Liberty of Limerick *go tír mac calláin* to Tirmocallain, being then in the occupation of Thomas the Talian (of *Clann Táil-vc*) the ancestor of *Mac an Oirchine* or McInerheneys, Irish surnames not then invented, pitched on the place aforesaid and in the possession of Thomas aforesaid, she addressed Thomas praying for a mam [ie handful] of land, [which] she called it *Mainéar Fáin* to build her chapel thereon. He bluntly refused her with harsh words dismissing her. She curtsied and said she would renew her petition to him for said grant in each of the two next Saturdays then following, protracting the time for the good of him (Thomas) alleging if he acquiesced within that period he should have her benediction and if he did not her malediction.

The time elapsed and the merits of the petition not granted, but strong in his defiance, her next application was to O'Brien of *Cnoc na nGiománac* (Knocknegemana a townland near Clare O.S note by 1841) ancestor to Lord Clare and to O'Brien of Ennistymon [and] ancestor to the house of Killeoin, and they both refused to grant, and one of them O'Brien of Ennistymon reviled her with the epithet *caileach*, and the two O'Briens partook of the interdiction and malediction.

Now the McInerheneys being before the said curse or malediction in possession of almost all the good ground between Limerick and Clare, alongside the Shannon.

⁹² No translation is given in the original manuscript.

Here follow[s] some of the words of the several curses beginning with O'Brien of Killeoin who called her *cailleach*.

*Mar chasar an máighre air a muir;
iona chlaidhire gan fuil, gan feoil.
Gab mairsin dh'iméas siol mBriain,
iona ndéise fiadh as cilleóin.*

As the salmon is transformed on the sea
[In]to a rogue without blood and without flesh
Thus [this is to] happen to the race of the O'Briens
Into wild weeds from Cill Eóin.

O'Brien of Knocknangeemanagh
*Uibh Bhriain cnuc na nGíomanách
Air a tuladh aoibhín aig amarc uait,
Na raibh do dhialuit ná do Ghiorrán
Air ffáil choidhche a ffearan Tuamhan.*

The O'Briens of Cnuc na nGíomanách,
On their beautiful promontory, as you look out;
That they may not have saddles nor garrons [horses]
Ever available [to them] in the territory of Tuamhan.

McInerheney of Coonagh
*Dala an chonaicc a meas na bó,
Gach naon chidhfios é a marbhugh leis
Gab marran, go mbiád deire léo
Cloine uí aonairchine as cunach.*

As with a murrain among cattle;
Everyone who sees it will be killed by it.
Let a murrain take them, until there be an end to them;
The solitary McInerheney family of Cunach.

McInerheney of Middlethird Cratloe
*Mac an Oirchine na Creatlighe meodhan
Nár sgarradh brón le muintir a thighe
Nár ráibh iona shealbh gardhaighe go deo
lae, ná bó, na cailín grín.*

McInerheney of Creatlighe Meodhan
Let not sorrow leave the folk of his house;
May they never have possession of a garden
A calf nor a cow nor fun-loving girl.

McInerheney of Knockdurlus
*Cloine uibh an oirchine chnoc durluis,
Gorta chuche mar bé is fearr léo dfáil,
Nár ab feictir choidhche aig aon d[on]
tre[abh] san
Caogat staide dfeor an tur fáil.*

The McInerheney family of Chnoc durluis;
Famine be with them, since it is what they deserve;
May there not be seen among any of that tribe
Fifty furlongs of the land of Ireland.

McInerheney of Smithstown
*Cloine uibh an Oirchine baile na nGaibhne
Gur srang a ccoim le ceal an bidh
anca bata do gach nduine bheir gréim doib
'sgan ioc ma bith sior bhlaise na dígh.*

The McInerheney family of Baile na nGaibhne.
Whose waists are emaciated from want of food;
A beating to everyone who gives them a bite [to eat]
And may they be forever without payment
And without a tasting of drink.

McInerheney of Tiermaclan
*Gidh geal an tionad tir mac caláin,
nar sgarradh támh leis, gon ffeor deire,
Don aicme chuirfe chlaon nach fuláin,
is measa cáil dar thearamh ó bhile*

Though Tir Mac Caláin is a fine place;
That idleness may not depart from it to the last man.
That band who would sow an unhealthy perversion
Descended from a tree of ill repute.[?]

The curse being fulminated by Saint Catherine and Thomas having repented had recourse to the abbey of Quin in the County of Clare, had access to the abbey of Quin and there petitioned for the prayer of 800 monks then inhabiting that abbey for their prayers to obtain his pardon and the blessing of God upon himself and his undertaking being then engaged in building a house at Cowlclohy between Newmarket on Fergus and Shepperton was answered by the prior that

Catherine's curse had ascended before Almighty God as soon as given and had been decided on, said if all the abbeys in the world, yea, all the angels and saints in Heaven and the Virgin Mary, had interceded for him on their knees till the Day of Judgment they would not be heard nor would he alter his judgment. Thomas in despair reviled St Catherine again and proclaimed a feast and invited the nobility of Thomond or North Munster to the entertainment. He had his long table laid out at the south end of the building and having seated his guests sitting down himself, the first bit[e] he took choked him and not a stone was since laid on the building. Its ruins are to be seen to this day between Newmarket on Fergus and Shepperton.

Thus ends the tale founded on truth and deduced from Irish History announcing the total extinction of McInerheney's whole race from enjoying 50 acres of fee farm or estate on the lands of Ireland for ever, and the fate of Lord Clare from Knocknagmanach and also O'Brien of Killeoin from that beautiful seat.

Mr MacMahon may plainly see from this how dangerous it was to meddle with the saints of old and likewise how Irish history is corrupted into fable by length of time. Witness St Catherine transformed into a mermaid recited and credited by some. I crave the gentle reader's protection to this tale being in the 81st year of my age and want be correct or genuine.

Sixmilebridge
May 11th 1825.

Signed: Connor Ryan