

A Note on the Uí Mhaoir of Drumcliff, Co. Clare¹

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In recent years historians have turned their attention toward the Gaelic learned lineages who served as a unique caste of hereditary *literati* and guardians of customary law and tradition. For Thomond, the brehon (*breitheamhain*) lineages of Uí Dhuibhdábhoireann,⁽²⁾ Mhic Aodhagáin,⁽³⁾ and Síol Fhlannchadha⁽⁴⁾ have received attention, as have the historian-chronicler (*seanchaidhe*) lineages of Uí Mhaoilchonaire⁽⁵⁾ Clann Bhruaideadha⁽⁶⁾ and Clann Chruitín.⁽⁷⁾ The purpose of this note is to highlight an obscure lineage associated with the Irish church, the Uí Mhaoir of Drumcliff parish.⁽⁸⁾ Little has been written specifically on the church lineages of Co. Clare (*comharbaí* and *airchinnigh*),⁽⁹⁾ excepting the brief expositions of Gleeson, Gaynor and Nicholls and the work on pre-reform hereditary clergy of the Dál gCais by Ó Corráin.⁽¹⁰⁾ This note seeks to partly remedy this and cast light on a lineage of the native ecclesiastical tradition.

The Uí Mhaoir (*anglicé* O'Meere/Meer) appear not to feature in the Gaelic books or annals, unlike other 'coarbial' lineages from Co. Clare such as the Uí Chiaróg of Rath⁽¹¹⁾ (*viz An Leabhar Muimhneach*), Uí Mhaeluidhir of Killistry⁽¹²⁾ (*viz An Leabhar Muimhneach*), Uí Cheallaigh of Tulla⁽¹³⁾ (*viz An Leabhar Muimhneach*); Uí Chianán of Kiltenanlea⁽¹⁴⁾ (*viz An Leabhar Muimhneach*); and Uí Ghráda of Tuamgraney⁽¹⁵⁾ (*viz Annals of the Four Masters*). This may attest to a later medieval coarbial connection to Drumcliff as they come into focus only in fifteenth century Papal correspondence. If this was the case, the Uí Mhaoir may not have had pre-reform (12th century) proprietorship of Drumcliff termon: though this would not in itself preclude the cultivation of traditional attitudes toward hereditary entitlement. Many of the pre-reform monastic sites were, by the later medieval period, downgraded in status to parochial sites whose lands were in the custody of coarbial and erenagh lineages with agnatic genealogical links to ruling Dál gCais families.⁽¹⁶⁾

The Uí Mhaoir held the 7½ quarters of Drumcliff termon⁽¹⁷⁾ as a customary coarbial lineage. Nomenclature of the surname Uí Mhaoir points to an origin derived from *Maor* denoting a servant or steward, lending credence to the possibility of an occupational name of coarbial origins.⁽¹⁸⁾ As early as 1414 we read in Papal correspondence that 'Matthew Omydyr' held Drumcliff vicarage while his kinsman 'Thady Omydyr' was promoted to the rectory (in ecclesiastical fee) of *Uí Chormaic*.⁽¹⁹⁾ Uí Mhaoir dominance at Drumcliff vicarage and, to a lesser extent, the rectory of *Uí Chormaic* is attested throughout the fifteenth century. Clearly by the fifteenth century the lineage were active in supplying hereditary clergy to Drumcliff parish, if not from an earlier date.

The proximity and rising fortunes of the secular Uí Ghríobhtha lineage resulted in their infiltration of Drumcliff rectory and surrounding benefices such as Dysert Tola.⁽²⁰⁾ In 1443 we read that Matthew Ogriffa, vicar of Dysert Tola and later Bishop of Killaloe (1463-83),⁽²¹⁾ travelled to the Roman court in that year and lodged a petition which sought collation of the rectorship of Drumcliff and alleged that Thady Omygyr (Tadhg Ó Maoir) had alienated

and dilapidated the goods of the rectory, committed simony, perjury and, it was alleged, homicide.⁽²²⁾

Papal provisions provide a stream of Uí Mhaoir clerics virtually monopolising Drumcliff vicarage from 1414 to 1483 (e.g. Thady Omygyr, 1447; Rory Omyr and Gillibertus *alias* Michael Omyr, 1453; Odo Omir, 1483).⁽²³⁾ By contrast Drumcliff rectory, or *Uí Chormaic*, was more contested with secular lineages holding benefices there from the mid-fifteenth century. Papal records indicate fewer Uí Mhaoir clerics holding the rectory benefice and its coveted revenue stream and prestigious monastic termon called '*ecclesia Sancti Conaldi*'.⁽²⁴⁾

At this point the question arises as to what constituted the coarbial activity of the Uí Mhaoir. By comparison with other hereditary church lineages, little is known about the Uí Mhaoir coarbs and the extent of their landholding. One notable reference occurs in the Irish Fiants in the year 1589-90 when 'Donogh O Myre of Drome Cleve' was pardoned along with numerous other Co. Clare freeholders.⁽²⁵⁾ Unlike some other Co. Clare freeholders who were pardoned, Donogh was not recorded as 'gent' thereby signaling that he was not regarded as a landholder of sufficient importance. This may reflect the fact that by the medieval period many coarbial and erenagh lineages had long become leading tenants on ecclesiastical lands annexed to the bishopric.⁽²⁶⁾ Nonetheless, a petition lodge at the Irish Court of Chancery in the seventeenth century and reproduced below, suggests that the Uí Mhaoir had at least nominal control over the 7½ quarters of Drumcliff, even if proprietary title was in the hands of the Bishop of Killaloe in right of bishopric lands.

Uí Mhaoir absence in Gaelic books or annals, and no apparent references amongst the Gaelic genealogies, is suggestive of a minor ecclesiastical lineage by that later date. By the early seventeenth century clerical lineages that had remained in possession of termon lands were required to show valid leases by bishops to continue in possession or face being sub-leased as simple tenants or ejected.⁽²⁷⁾ The Uí Mhaoir were involved in a power struggle between the Earls of Thomond and the bishops of Killaloe concerning proprietorship of Drumcliff termon. The dispute owed its origins to a lease arrangement of the termon lands dating from the 1590s.

In 1635-6 Patrick O'Meere launched a suit at the Court of Chancery against the Protestant Bishop of Killaloe, Lewis Jones, claiming Drumcliff as his ancient hereditament. The contents of the petition are referred to in a 'bill of answer' by defendants now lodged at Petworth House Archive.⁽²⁸⁾ This bill provides us with the most detailed account of the Uí Mhaoir case and it stated that Drumcliff termon was leased by Mauritius (Murchadh) O'Brien, Bishop of Killaloe, to Daniel Neylan, Bishop of Kildare (d.1603) for 99 years at a nominal rent (9*d* per annum)⁽²⁹⁾ before it was assigned to the fourth Earl of Thomond.⁽³⁰⁾ The lease was proved invalid and surrendered to Lewis Jones, Bishop of Killaloe in 1634

who leased the lands to Boetius Clancy at £40 per annum. The suit touched on the Uí Mhaoir right to proprietorship by virtue of being *in situ* at Drumcliff prior to the original lease made to the Bishop of Kildare.

The view subscribed by Gleeson, but accorded little merit by Dwyer, was that O’Meere’s suit was probably launched under the auspices of the Earl of Thomond but was dropped when the Earl and Bishop of Killaloe reached an agreement.⁽³¹⁾ From Bishop Rider’s notes we know that by 1622 Drumcliff was not recognised as ‘coarbial land’ (e.g. ‘*converbiatu*’) unlike Tomfinlough, Tulla, Moynoe, Tuamgraney and Dysert⁽³²⁾ so it is likely that the Uí Mhaoir were not exercising quasi-ecclesiastical functions by that date. This point is attested by the fourth and fifth Earls of Thomonds’ attempts to claim secular proprietorship over Drumcliff termon in the 1620s.⁽³³⁾

The issue is further illuminated in a different Chancery Pleading dated 3 November 1603 that Richard Scurlock of ‘Dirawen’ Co. Clare held, since 1596, the ‘Rectory of Dromcreif and Kilvally alias Ogormicke’ by demise from William O Costely ‘parson’ (i.e. rector) of Drumcliff. Scurlock’s position was contested by would-be local candidates, Donagh McSwyne of ‘Tramro’ (Kilmurry-Ibrickan parish) and Dermot O Herny who obtained, ‘by false information’, the administration of the lands by the Prerogative Court.⁽³⁴⁾

Clearly, the rectory and any spiritual functions of the church at Drumcliff were out of the hands of the Uí Mhaoir by the late sixteenth century. Contested possession of the rectory (i.e. revenue derived from lands) may suggest that the Uí Mhaoir were farming the rectory lands but that the rectory benefice itself was in the hands of the Sheriff

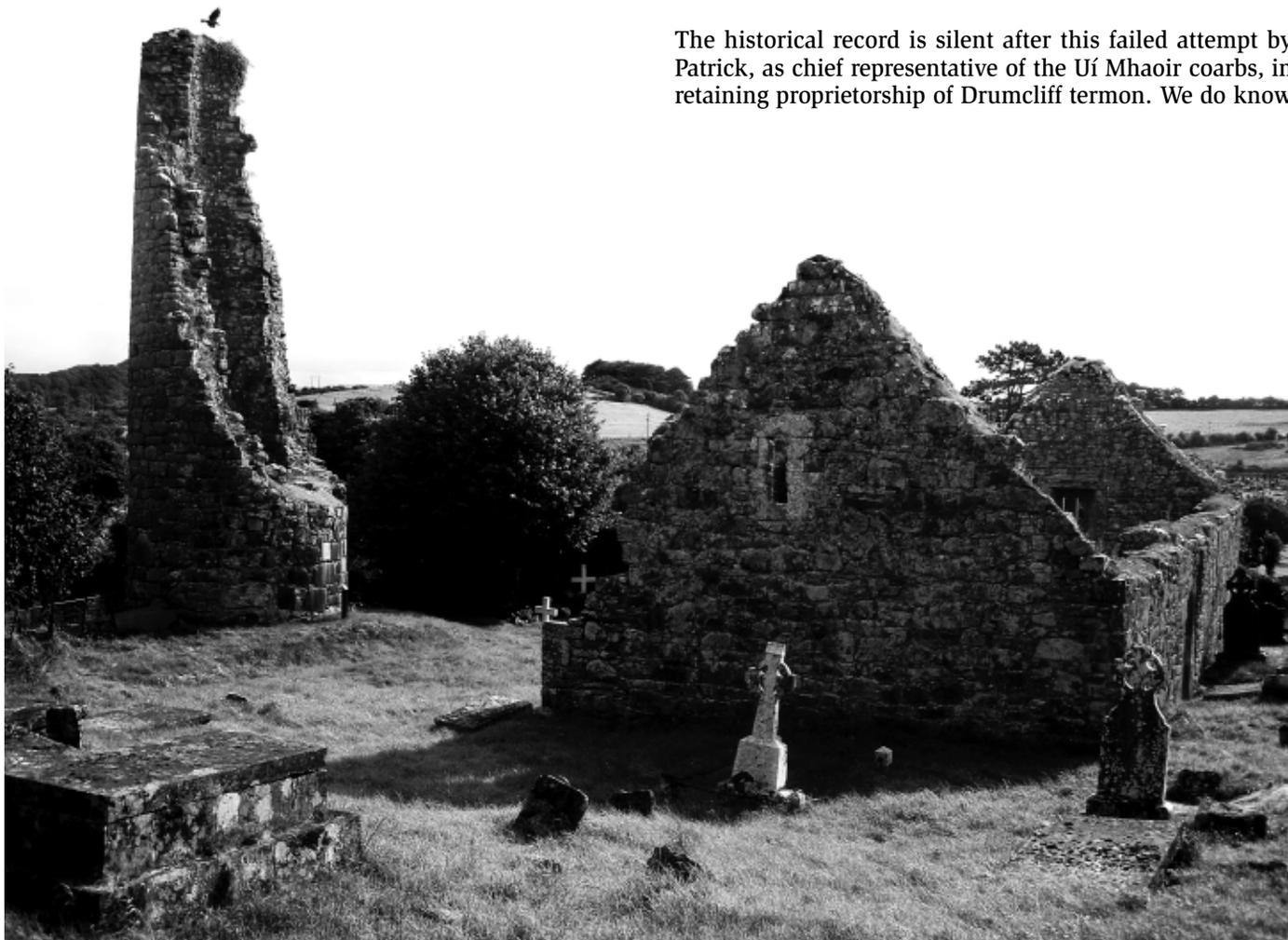
(*sub anno* 1599) of Co. Clare, Richard Scurlock,⁽³⁵⁾ and local Irish clerics.

This must have made for an uneasy existence as the Uí Mhaoir were probably already becoming sidelined and their claims of proprietorship over the lands of Drumcliff refuted, as the rectory lands were appropriated by other New-English settlers under the auspices of the Earl of Thomond, such as William Torongood in 1608. The appointment of John Rider as Bishop of Killaloe in 1612 saw a reassertion of the Church of Ireland’s claims over ecclesiastical lands in the diocese, which invariably meant that Gaelic clerical lineages were either disenfranchised of the lands they had custody over or reduced in status to that of ordinary tenants.

An undated (c.1635?) Court of Chancery Pleading now lodged at the National Archives, attests to the dispossession of the Uí Mhaoir of Drumcliff and to this end is worthy to be reproduced in full:

Patrick O Meere of Dromcleave in co. Clare, gent
 Donogh O Meere was seised of the town and 7 quarters of Dromcleave and being so seised granted a yearly rent of 13s.9d. out of each of 4 quarters to the see of Killaloe. About 27 years since one William Torogood,⁽³⁶⁾ by the commandment of Donogh, late earl of Thomond, whose lands adjoined the said 7 quarters, entered therein and thrust out the said Donogh O Meere and his family. After the death of said Donogh, suppliant, as his son and heir petitioned the Lord Viscount Wentworth, Lord Deputy and the case was referred to the justices of assize. The earl of Thomond disclaimed inheritance of the land, alleging it to belong to the see of Killaloe. Now Lewis Lord Bishop of Killaloe has made an estate of the same to Boetius Clancy of Knockfin and Robert Coppinger of Kellon, Esqs. To the use of the court of Thomond.⁽³⁷⁾

The historical record is silent after this failed attempt by Patrick, as chief representative of the Uí Mhaoir coarbs, in retaining proprietorship of Drumcliff termon. We do know



Drumcliff church and the remains of the tenth century round tower.

that an answer to the petition by the defendants (including Henry O'Brien, son of the 4th Earl of Thomond) has survived and is found at the Petworth House Archive. Internal evidence dates the document to after December 1634. This excerpt attests the key facts:

Answer to Meere Bill / The joint and several answers of Henry Earl of Thomond, Boetius Clanchie and Robert Cappinger defendants to the bill of compl[aint] of Patrick O Meere, compl[ainant].

...that the said town has seven ploughlands of Dromcleave in the bill of compl[aint] mentioned that part of the inheritance and demesne lands anciently belonging to the Bishopric of Killaloe, and that Daniel formerly Bishop of Kildare being possessed of the same by lease for year to him thereof past and made by Mauritius sometime Bishop of Killaloe aforesaid; the lease paid Daniel Bishop of Kildare (in consideration of a certain sum of money and for and in consideration of the importance and fee simple of demesne parcel of land of great value, whereof Donat late Earl of Thomond, the defendant, gave was [...] in fee simple and 6 own ancient inheritance, and which the said Donogh late Earl of Thomond did rent and convey [...] but the said Daniel formerly Bishop of Killaloe and his heirs forever) did assign his interest and whole terms in the said town and seven quarters of land of Dromcleave...that the said Donogh O'Meere in the bill mentioned was seized in his demesne as of fee descended unto him from his ancestors, of the said town and lands or that the yearly[?] rent ~~by him paid thereof[?] unto the See of Killaloe~~ and him payable thereout, ~~to the see,~~ was and unto of any grant that the said Donogh made thereof unto the See of Killaloe as in the said bill of compl[aint]...and that the said seven ploughlands and the consent of the said late Earl did violently enter into the possession of the said town and lands...and did thereout expulse the said Donogh in such nature[,] manner and same[?] that in the said bill of compl[aint] is sure[?] right[?] but was put out of his possession of the same in a quiet and peaceful manner as this defendant humbly pledged and that the said late Earl did covenant the said William Torongood in any such violent [?] act, and regard that the said late Earl had no right or title to the said town and lands, or that the See of Killaloe had no more right thereunto but the said rent in the bill mentioned, and that the said plaintiff [re: Patrick O'Meere] is son and heir of the said Donogh for amongst this defendant's knowledge...⁽³⁸⁾

The Uí Mhaoir do not feature as landholders in the 1641 *Books of the Survey and Distribution* and they seldom feature in leases or rentals in the *Inchiquin Manuscripts*. The only mention of the family in the *Inchiquin Manuscripts* concerns a deed of feoffment by Hugh O'Meere to Donnogh O'Brien Fitz Connor of the land and castle of 'Balliasie' (modern Ballyashea) in Kilnamona parish to hold until Hugh's son, Rory O'Meere, had been paid £15 according to a deed made to Hugh by the feoffee in 1627.⁽³⁹⁾ The presence of Uí Mhaoir kinsmen in Kilnamona parish who were in the possession of 'Balliasie' castle points to them being freeholders of some status. However, the genealogical link between the Uí Mhaoir coarbs of Drumcliff and this branch at Kilnamona, itself containing important termon lands under Uí Ghríobhtha control,⁽⁴⁰⁾ remains obscure.

The family nonetheless remained numerous in the Drumcliff locality and the surnames 'Mears' and 'Meer' recorded in the 1825 tithe applotment books bear witness to this fact.⁽⁴¹⁾ It is difficult to discern the legacy of lineages such as the Uí Mhaoir due to their obscurity in the historical record. The Uí Mhaoir chancery pleadings illustrate dislocation faced by sept-lineages during that crucial period of transition from Gaelic lordship to an anglicised county and the changes in landholding which resulted. Further work remains to be done on understanding this juncture and

how hereditary sept-lineages such as the *comharbaí* and *airchinnigh*, who held a unique position in Gaelic society, adapted to that change.

References

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- 2 See George U. Macnamara, 'The O'Davorens of Cahermac-naughten, Burren, Co. Clare', *Journal of the North Munster Archaeological Society*, Vol 2, Nos. 2 & 3, 1912, pp.63-93.
- 3 See Fergus Kelly, 'Giolla na Naomh Mac Aodhagáin: a thirteenth-century legal innovator' in *Mysteries and solutions in Irish legal history*, Ed. Desmond Greer & Norma Dawson, Dublin 2001, pp.1-14.
- 4 See Luke McInerney, 'The Síol Fhlannchadha of Tradraighe', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, 2012, [forthcoming].
- 5 See Brian Ó Dálaigh, 'The Uí Mhaoilchonaire of Thomond', *Studia Hibernica*, 2009-2010, pp.45-68.
- 6 See Diarmuid Ó Murchadha 'The Origins of Clann Bhruid-eadhá', *Éigse: Journal of Irish Studies*, No.31, 1999, pp.121-130.
- 7 See Vincent Morley, *An Crann os Coill: Aodh Búí Mac Cruitín, c.1680-1755*, Baile Átha Cliath, Coiscéim, 1995.
- 8 On Drumcliff's origins see Dermot F. Gleeson, 'The Patron Saint of Dromcliffe', *Molua*, 1958, pp.46-47.
- 9 On the roles of *comharbaí* and *airchinnigh* see Henry A. Jefferies, 'Erenaghs and Termonlands: Another Early Seventeenth-Century Account', *Seanchas Ard Mhacha*, Vol.19, No.1, 2002, pp.55-58.
- 10 Dermot Gleeson, 'The Coarbs of Killaloe Diocese', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, No.79, 1949, pp.160-169; Kenneth W. Nicholls cited in Anne O'Sullivan, 'Saint Brecán of Clare', *Celitca*, Vol.XV, 1983, pp.128-139, p.139; Rev. Patrick Gaynor, 'Kilnamona, called Kinelbuith', *Molua*, 1941, pp.9-23; Donncha Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais - Church and Dynasty', *Ériu*, Vol.24, 1973, pp.52-63.
- 11 The Uí Chiaróg of Ráthblathmaic descended from Cailín Ciarodhar [Cailín of the black-brown hair]. See Tadhg Ó Donnchadha, *An Leabhar Muimhneach*, IMC, Dublin, 1940, pp. 295, 311. Genealogies place Muinnter Chiaróg as originally of Uí Bhloid origin and derive from 'Brenaind ban' [white-haired] son of Bloid. Seán Ó hÓgáin, *Conntae an Cláir: A Triocha Agus A Tuatha*, Oifig an tSoláitair, Baile Átha Cliath, 1938, p.13.
- 12 Anne O'Sullivan, 'Saint Brecán of Clare', p.139. Also, Tadhg Ó Donnchadha, *An Leabhar Muimhneach*, p.312.
- 13 Tadhg Ó Donnchadha *An Leabhar Muimhneach*, p.312.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p.313. They are described therein as 'Ua tSagairt Mhóir' (grandsons of the great priest).
- 15 *Annals of the Four Masters*, sub anno, 1184, 1485.
- 16 Donncha Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais - Church and Dynasty', p.62. Examples include the Uí Dheaghaidh at Dysert Tola, the Uí Chuinn at Kilnaboy and Uí Ghráda at Tuamgraney. Another example are the Uí Ógáin who occupied ecclesiastical lands in Co. Clare and Co. Tipperary and who also had a presence in Rathblathmaic.
- 17 Bishop Worth's book (c.1660) notes the sub-denominations as: Ryne, Loughvellie, Knockrone, Carrownacreene, Ballyconaght, Drumcliffe als Balliannagh, Clunfeagh, Shanhilltagh. In total the termon consisted of 787 acres. Rev. Philip Dwyer, *The Diocese of Killaloe from the Reformation to the Eighteenth Century*, p.329.
- 18 Dermot F. Gleeson, *A History of the Diocese of Killaloe* (Dublin, 1962), p.142. The Mac Maoir were the traditional custodians of the Book of Armagh where the name was anglicised MacWyre. The Irish word *maor* can also denote custodian of relicts and from which the Armagh family likewise took their name.
- 19 'Lateran Regesta, 180: 1414-1415', *Calendar of Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland, Volume 6: 1404-1415* (1904), p.479.
- 20 The Uí Ghríobhtha hold on Dysert and Kilnamona was, however, short-lived as they were eclipsed by the assertion

- of Uí Bhriain power in the area at the end of the fifteenth century. Rev. Patrick Gaynor, 'Kilnamona, called Kinelbuith', *Molua*, 1941, pp.9-23, pp.17-20.
- 21 His obit is recorded in the Irish annals as 1483 and that he was 'honourably interred in the monastery of the Canons, in Corca-Baiscinn' (i.e. the Augustinian abbey of Inisgad). *Annals of the Four Masters, sub anno*, 1483.
 - 22 'Lateran Regesta, 403: 1443-1444', *Calendar of Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland, Volume 9: 1431-1447* (1912), p.371.
 - 23 'Lateran Regesta, 438: 1447', *Calendar of Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland, Volume 10: 1447-1455* (1915), p.326; 'Lateran Regesta, 485: 1453, *Calendar of Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland, Volume 10: 1447-1455* (1915), p.632; 'Lateran Regesta, 635: 1482-1483', *Calendar of Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland, Volume 13: 1471-1484* (1955), p.145.
 - 24 Dermot F. Gleeson, 'The Patron Saint of Dromcliffe', p.46.
 - 25 *The Irish Fiant of the Tudor Sovereigns: During the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Phillip & Mary, and Elizabeth I*, Éamonn de Búrca Publisher, Dublin, 1994, Fiant 5401 [1589-90, 23 March].
 - 26 On proprietorship of coarbial and erenagh lands in Ulster, but which had parallels to other parts of Ireland see Michael Glancy, 'The Church Lands of Armagh, No.2', *Seanchas Ard Mhacha*, Vol.3, No.2, 1959, pp.341-379, pp.346-347. On a good summary of different arrangements of landholding that prevailed among the erenaghs and coarbs see Canice Mooney OFM, *The Church in Gaelic Ireland 13th to 15th Centuries*, Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 1969, pp.10-15.
 - 27 Much of our understanding concerning the dispossession of erenaghs and coarbs is informed by the Ulster forfeitures. By 1616 King James I allowed bishops to grant sixty year leases on erenagh land but afterwards they were to be restrained from granting any larger estates than leases for twenty-one years. The granting of sixty year leases on erenagh lands was conditional; further provisions allowed the granting only after examination of title, and an increase in rent was levied on leases held under fraudulent patents. *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Ireland, of the Reign of James I: 1615-1625*, preserved in Her Majesty's Public Record Office, Longman & Co., London, 1880, pp.129-130. On a similar enquiry into church lands in Killaloe Diocese see Philip Dwyer, *The Diocese of Killaloe from the Reformation to the Eighteenth Century*, p.87
 - 28 MS 3915 (dated 1635/6) Petworth House Archives, West Sussex Record Office, Chichester ['the letter missive of the Lord Chancellor of Ireland to the Earl of Thomond concerning the complaint of Patrick O'Meere']; and Rev. Philip Dwyer, *Diocese of Killaloe from the reformation to the eighteenth century*, p.329.
 - 29 In 1622 it was recorded that the Earl of Thomond held Drumcliff for 100 years at a rent of 9d per annum. Rev. Philip Dwyer, *The Diocese of Killaloe from the Reformation to the Eighteenth Century*, p.135
 - 30 See MS 3915 (dated 1635/6) Petworth House Archives, West Sussex Record Office, Chichester ['the letter missive of the Lord Chancellor of Ireland to the Earl of Thomond concerning the complaint of Patrick O'Meere']. Also see Rev. Philip Dwyer, *The Diocese of Killaloe from the Reformation to the Eighteenth Century*, p.329.
 - 31 Rev. Philip Dwyer, *The Diocese of Killaloe from the Reformation to the Eighteenth Century*, p.329. On an alternative view on the O'Meere case see Dermot Gleeson, 'The Patron Saint of Dromcliffe', p.47.
 - 32 Rev. Philip Dwyer, *The Diocese of Killaloe from the Reformation to the Eighteenth Century*, pp.135-36.
 - 33 According to a 1625 Chancery Pleading the 7 quarters of 'Dromcleiffe' were the 'ancient inheritance of the Earl of Thomond' and that Henry O'Brien, fifth Earl of Thomond, holds no lease to the lands by Bishop of Kildare to whom the lands were initially demised by Mauritius Bishop of Killaloe. The fourth Earl of Thomond had thought to surrender the lands and accept a re-grant by letters patent. The fourth Earl received a grant from King James I in 1620 to lands including the 7 quarters of Drumcliff. *Chancery Bills: Survivals from pre-1922 Collection*, No.131 [13 February 1625], National Archives, Dublin, and *Irish Patent Rolls of James I: 1603-1625*, Stationery Office, Dublin, 1966, Pat. 18, James I, [p.494].
 - 34 *Chancery Bills: Survivals from pre-1922 Collection*, [A] [3 Nov.1603] No.291, National Archives, Dublin.
 - 35 Richard Scurlock was part of the New-English administration and was appointed Sheriff of Co. Clare in 1599. *Annals of the Four Masters, sub anno*, 1599.
 - 36 William Torogood was one of the original 13 burgesses of the Ennis Corporation. See Brian Ó Dálaigh, *Corporation Book of Ennis*, Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1990, p.388.
 - 37 *Chancery Bills: Survivals from pre-1922 Collection*, [G1] [undated], National Archives, Dublin.
 - 38 MS 3915 (dated 1635/6) Petworth House Archives, West Sussex Record Office, Chichester ['the letter missive of the Lord Chancellor of Ireland to the Earl of Thomond concerning the complaint of Patrick O'Meere'].
 - 39 John Ainsworth (ed) *The Inchiquin Manuscripts*, IMC, Dublin, 1961, p.335 (no.1038).
 - 40 See Rev. Patrick Gaynor, "Kilnamona, called Kinelbuith", *Molua*, 1941, pp.9-23
 - 41 *Tithe Applotment Books*, Drumcliff parish, July 1825.