

**Diarmuid Ó Murchadha and Kevin Murray**  
**'Place-names'**

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# Place-names

DIARMUID Ó MURCHADHA AND KEVIN MURRAY

The purpose of this chapter is to give a brief overview of Irish place-name research, to examine part of the theoretical framework behind medieval and modern naming practices and to attempt to put this work into its international perspective. It concentrates on place-names derived from the Irish (Gaelic) language which form the bulk of the country's toponymy. Place-name examples are generally cited in the Irish language with their modern-day equivalents following in brackets.

## THE EARLY MEDIEVAL BACKGROUND

Irish place-names created before the end of the Old Irish period (*ca.* 900 AD) fall generally into two main categories. One relates to the population groups occupying specific areas on which they imposed their names, for example the Cairbre (Carbury in Sligo and Kildare), the Benntraighe (Bantry in Wexford and Cork) and the Luigne (Lune in Meath and Leyny in Sligo). Three of our provinces are named from large population groups — Connacht (Connachta), Ulster (Ulaid) and Leinster (Laigin). The other category, probably older still, relates to prominent natural features, many of which use lexical items based on parts of the body to describe them, for example *ceann* 'head', *béal* 'mouth', *más* 'buttock' (Ó Maolfabhail 1987–88) as in *Ceann Muice* (Headborough, county Waterford), *Béal Átha Chomair* (Ballycumber, county Offaly) and *Más Ramhar* (Mausrower, county Kerry). Some mountain and river names may have been adapted from non-Gaelic speaking predecessors and are difficult to explain purely in terms of the Gaelic language. Even such a noted 'Irish' name as Blarney may perhaps be traced back to pre-Gaelic times (O'Rahilly 1964, 257). But for certain of our earliest chroniclers it soon became a labour of love to provide a meaningful exposition of many such celebrated place-names throughout Ireland.

Names of important sites were analysed into component parts around which elaborate legendary

anecdotes were woven into what was called *dindshenchas* or 'place-lore'. However spurious the analysis may have been, the existence of an apposite story or poem often heightened both the significance of the site and that of the name itself. As Professor Proinsias Mac Cana remarks,

there can be little doubt that the Irish landscape and the *dindshenchas*, 'the history of places', which was its collective reflex in tribal myth and history served together as an effective mnemonic index and treasury of a great part of native tradition. (Mac Cana 1980, 27)

This wide-ranging miscellany of toponomic lore was assembled and committed to writing in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These collections of *dindshenchas* are available in modern editions (Stokes 1892, 1893; Gwynn 1903–35), the best-known being the 'Metrical Dindshenchas', a series of 176 poems celebrating places as far apart as *Carn Uí Néid* (Mizen Head) at the south-west extremity of county Cork and *Coire Bhreacáin*, a whirlpool off the coast of county Antrim.

As already intimated, the etymologies assigned to the various names need not be taken too seriously. For example, what we now call the Galtee mountains were originally named *Crotta Cliach*, 'the humps of (the territory called) Cliú'. But in the relevant *dindshenchas* poem *Cliach* becomes a fairy harper and *Crotta* (which also means 'harps') the place where he made his music (Gwynn 1913, 224). Killarney's principal lake, *Loch Léin* (Gwynn 1913, 260–2), as celebrated then as now, became the underwater forge of a smith called Léan who each night would hurl his fiery anvil into the sky across Munster until it landed at *Indeoin na nDéise*, 'the anvil of the Déise' — which is an actual location still recalled in the name of the townland of Mullaghnooney (*Mullach na hInneona*) near Clonmel, county Tipperary.

The composer of the poem on *Luimneach*, the estuary



Fig. 14.1 An ancient island landscape, the abandoned settlement on Inishmurrury (Inis Muireadhaigh) off the Sligo coast, viewed from the early medieval monastic enclosure on the island.

of the Shannon, had two explanations of the name. One of the connotations of *luimneach* is 'cloaked', so he made it the site of a battle between the men of Munster and of Connacht where, when the tide turned, the estuary was strewn with cloaks. Or, he suggests, it may derive from *lumman*, 'a spiky shield', large numbers of which were borne by the opposing forces (Gwynn 1913, 270–4). In the case of the river Shannon itself, the poet first opted for Sinann, a golden-haired maiden of the mythological race known as the Túatha Dé Danann, as eponym, but prior to supplying an alternative derivation, wryly remarked: 'It is no better than the first version' (Gwynn 1913, 286–96).

Both names for Dublin are noticed. *Áth Cliath*, 'ford of the hurdles', proved too obvious for etymological speculation, so the poet contented himself with a legendary four-headed monster with four score feet who was slain in the Boyne valley and whose carcass, washed up in Dublin, provided the hurdles which gave the ford its name (Gwynn 1913, 101–3). The other name, *Duibhind*, 'black pool', was linked to a man named Rodub ('very black') whose daughter, a druid and poet, was slain there by a jealous rival (Gwynn 1913, 94).

The magnetism of place lore was by no means

confined to the official *dindshenchas* but pervaded almost all aspects of early Irish literature, as Professor Brian Ó Cuív, among others, has shown (see also Kinsella, Kelleher and Haley 1975; Kinsella 1969, introduction). Referring to the epic saga of the Ulster Cycle, *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Ó Cuív drew attention to the section where the hero Cú Chulainn on his first expedition was accompanied by his charioteer who, like his modern taxi-driver counterpart, was familiar with the name and fame of each place through which they passed. When questioned by Cú Chulainn, '... he told him the name of every chief fort between Temair and Cenannas (Tara and Kells, county Meath). He named, moreover, their meadowlands and their fords, their renowned places and their dwellings, their forts and their fortified heights' (Ó Cuív 1989–90, 92). And when Queen Medb's expedition set out from the Connacht headquarters at *Crúacha* (modern-day Rathcroghan, county Roscommon) to capture the famed brown bull, it did not suffice for the storyteller to recount that they arrived some days later in *Cúailnge* (now Cooley, county Louth). Instead, he introduced a litany of sixty-five names of places (all famous in their own right) through which the army passed on its march (Strachan and O'Keeffe 1904–12, 5–7).

Another example of this genre is to be found in the Fianaigheacht cycle. In *Acallam na Senórach*, 'the Colloquy of the Ancients', the storyteller ingeniously linked St Patrick with aged survivors of an earlier epoch, Oisín and Caoilte, who accompanied Patrick on a tour of famous sites, using each name as a key to unlock the wealth of lore attached to storied mountain cairn or ancient embattled fortress. In the course of their peregrinations they arrived at what is now Ardpark in county Limerick but was then known as *Fionntulach* or *Tulach na Féinne*. Patrick's query as to the reason for this name gave Caoilte the opportunity to describe an occasion when three battalions of the Fianna were preparing to march from there to fight the battle of *Finntráigh* (Ventry, county Kerry), and the vista of serried rows of spearshafts bound with enchanted cinctures caused Fionn mac Cumhaill to exclaim: *Is fionn an tulach* ('fair is the hill') — and what better name for it than *Fionntulach!* (O'Grady 1892, 110). Many place-names in Fianaigheacht lore, however, seem to exist only within the literature and the imagination (see Ó Coileáin 1993) and as actual place-names have lost (or never had) a locative function, a process that elsewhere has been referred to as 'de-onymization' (Baumgarten 1990, 121).

#### THE INFLUENCE OF THE CAMBRO-NORMANS

This zest for onomastic lore suffered a major setback in two respects following the arrival of the Cambro-Normans in Ireland in the late twelfth century. Firstly, the very fabric of romantic Gaelic-style names was rudely shattered in many areas where the landscape was transformed into clearly defined landholdings, most of whose names embodied the word *baile* ('town', 'homestead') with a personal name affixed, for example Barry's town / *Baile an Bharraigh* (Barrystown, county Wexford), Launder's town / *Baile an Londraigh* (Ballylanders, county Limerick) and Simon's town / *Baile Shíomóin* (Ballysimon, county Cork). Ancient Gaelic names were submerged in the flood of prosaic *bailte*: *Dún Cruadha* became *Baile Chaisleáin an Róistigh* (Castletownroche, county Cork) (Power 1932, 49 and 111) while *Dún na Séad* changed to *Baile an Tighe Mhóir* (Baltimore, county Cork) (O'Donovan, 1856, iii and 188). *Cill Ghobáin* yielded to *Baile na Tóna* (Bottomstown, county Limerick) (Ó Maolfabhail 1990, 46) and *Mairgheanáin* became *Baile Bhaileanáin* (Ballyballinaun, county Mayo) (Ó Murchadha 1994–5, 22). The Norman mode of land division, including the use of the word *baile*, became widespread in an Irish-speaking environment, as may be seen from a list of Roche lands in county Cork in 1461 (de hÓir 1967a) or from the descriptions of the lands of Uí Mhaine and Uí Fhiachrach in Connacht (O'Donovan 1843, 44).

Yet most of the old names were retained, albeit in a new mode of spelling. The Normans, and their Anglo-

Irish successors, adapted Gaelic names within the sound systems of their own languages. In the early thirteenth-century *Song of Dermot and the Earl* (Orpen 1892) written in Norman French, *Áth Cliath* became 'Haythcleyth' (Dublin), *Gleann dá Locha* became 'Glindelath' (Glendalough, county Wicklow) and *Bearbha* became 'la Barue' (the river Barrow). From then on, 'anglicized' forms became the norm for official purposes — Tara (*Teamhair*), Armagh (*Ard Mhacha*), Tipperary (*Tiobraid Árann*) and so on. In some instances, through folk-etymology, this resulted in such peculiar forms as Tomregan, county Cavan (*Tuaim Dreacón*), Scaryhill, county Antrim (*Scarbhchoill*) and Vinegar Hill, county Wexford (*Cnoc Fiodh na gCaor*).

A second inauspicious factor was the cessation of creative onomastics. While *dindsenchas* continued to be copied by scribes, nothing new was added to the corpus. Because of the emphasis on land acquisition due to an increasing population, place-names now acquired an even more territorial dimension, linking to septs and sub-septs their ancestral lands and delimiting their boundaries. There are some tribal-oriented poems which reflect the Gaelic reaction to the take-over of large tracts of territory by lords of Norman descent. The best-known examples, the 'Topographical Poems' of Seaán Mór Ó Dubhagáin and Giolla-na-naomh Ó hUidhrín (O'Donovan 1862; Carney 1943), though compiled in the late fourteenth century, totally ignore the territorial changes wrought by the Norman incursions. A later production, Aonghus Ó Dálaigh's 'Tribes of Ireland' (O'Donovan 1852), lampooned indiscriminately lords both of Gaelic and Norman descent countrywide. Regional ownership tracts provide even more fruitful place-name sources, in particular those for Caoille (O'Keefe 1928; Power 1932) and Corca Laoighdhe (O'Donovan 1849) in county Cork, Uí Mhaine in county Galway (O'Donovan 1843), Uí Fhiachrach in county Sligo (O'Donovan 1844), the Maguires of Fermanagh (Ua Duinnín 1917) and O'Reillys of county Cavan (Carney 1959). Then there is a sixteenth-century poem which rather than dealing with land ownership portrays the cattle-raiding exploits of Donnchadh Ó Ceallacháin of Duhallow, county Cork (de hÓir 1967b). That the composer of this remarkable poem relished the resonance of Munster place-names is obvious from the fact that in the course of 420 lines he managed to name over 200 different places.

#### THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN PLACE-NAME SCHOLARSHIP IN IRELAND

In the seventeenth century the first stirrings of a renewed scholarly interest in toponymy became evident in the work of the Irish Franciscans at Louvain. Fr John Colgan wrote to many quarters in Ireland requesting lists of names of ecclesiastical sites for use in his great work on

Irish saints (Colgan 1645). He also hoped to publish an Irish ecclesiastical onomasticon but — mainly due to the failure of people in Ireland to reply to his inquiries — he never succeeded in this enterprise (Mooney 1946–50, a–b). The conflicts of the mid- and late 1600s inhibited further scholarship to a large extent, until the *pax Britannica* of the following century allowed a resumption. By then it was no longer native scholars who rose to prominence in the study of ancient Irish culture, but rather Anglo-Irish ones whose knowledge of the Irish language was meagre and whose etymological efforts were often misleading — people such as Mervyn Archdall, antiquary and rector of Slane, county Meath, author of *Monasticon Hibernicum* (Dublin 1786), Edward Ledwich, vicar of Aghaboe, county Laois, author of *Antiquities of Ireland* (Dublin 1789) and General Charles Vallancey, author of the six-volume *Collectanea de rebus Hibernicis* (1770–1804).

It was not until the establishment of the Ordnance Survey in Ireland in 1824, and in particular the appointment of Thomas Larcom as administrator four years later, that the study of Irish place-names was placed on a proper footing. Larcom's interest in the history and human ecology of the areas surveyed led to the assembling of invaluable data for most of the northern counties. He then appointed a team of scholars, including Eugene O'Curry, James Clarence Mangan, Patrick O'Keeffe, Thomas O'Connor — and in particular John O'Donovan — to decide upon the original Irish form of each name, so that a standard anglicized form could be provided for the Ordnance Survey maps. The pity is that the original Gaelic spelling was not retained, as it was in the case of many similar names in Scotland. In the course of frequent and arduous journeys to the four quarters of pre-Famine Ireland between 1834 and 1841 O'Donovan and the others amassed a prodigious quantity of topographical information, and not just in regard to townland names. The Ordnance Survey Letters, Name Books and Memoranda preserve copious details of named features on the landscape (such as hills, hollows, rivulets and so forth) along with meticulous recording of any ancient remains visible. In 1841 the work of the topographical team was terminated — sadly before county Cork was visited — and O'Donovan's employment was reduced. Not so his workload, however. Already, subsequent to the founding of the Irish Archaeological Society in 1841, he had edited for publication a series of important Irish historical and topographical works. His pioneering insight into these sources proved indispensable in his topographical work at the Ordnance Survey and, conversely, his familiarity with townland and parish names acquired there often helped to locate ancient sites referred to in manuscript sources. He continued until his untimely death to edit further significant works, his



Fig. 14.2 Prof. Edmund Hogan, seated centre, from A page of Irish history: the story of University College Dublin (Dublin 1930).

crowning achievement being the publication (by Hodges, Smith and Co., Dublin) of what is generally known as *The annals of the Four Masters* (O'Donovan 1848–51), a manuscript collection of annals from the earliest times to 1616, compiled by a seventeenth-century quartet of friars. In this formidable undertaking he had the assistance of Eugene O'Curry and George Petrie, but O'Donovan was the scholar whose annotations provided for each name in turn a comprehensive body of topographical evidence. Most of his identifications were extremely accurate, and even to the present day *The annals of the Four Masters* remain a treasure trove for researchers.

#### PATRICK WESTON JOYCE AND EDMUND HOGAN

Next we must touch upon two of the most important place-name publications ever in Ireland. Firstly, Joyce's *The origin and history of Irish names of places*. Many of those who edited Irish texts or collections of annals in the late nineteenth century depended almost entirely on O'Donovan for place-name identification, but Joyce, a self-taught scholar like O'Donovan himself, set a new

course. Patrick Weston Joyce (1827–1914) grew up in a hamlet called *Gleann Oisín* (Glenosheen), not far from Ardpátraig (*Ard Pádraig*) in county Limerick, surrounded by mountains and glens bearing such names as *Suidhe Finn*, *Bearna Gaoithe*, *Gleann an Áir*, *Ladhar na bhFraochán* and *Ladhar na Gréine*, the last being the name he later gave to his residence in Rathmines, ‘Lyrena-grena’. Little wonder that from his youth he was imbued with an intense consciousness of those mellifluous names which were as much a part of his landscape as the very hills and valleys they designated. An indefatigable worker, in more than two dozen publications he illuminated many neglected areas of Irish culture — history (political and social), language, folk music and various aspects of education — but the work for which he is most renowned is his three-volume study mentioned above. Joyce was the first to realize the potential of the index of townlands, parishes and baronies which the labours of the Ordnance Survey had made available (Census 1861). Here was presented an alphabetical list of all the townland names in Ireland, a cornucopia overflowing with samples of place-name elements from every part of the country. When treating of the word *teamhair* (‘elevated spot’, ‘height’), for instance, he was not confined to Tara in county Meath since the index lists townlands also named Tara in counties Down, Offaly and Wexford. Furthermore, Joyce found there townlands named Taur, Tower and Tawran, all of which he utilized to illustrate the semantics of the word (Joyce 1869, 295–6). In this way he built up a whole series of different categories to elucidate the system by which place-names were formed and the manner in which usage and pronunciation varied from one region to another. In concluding the preface to his final volume, written the year before he died, Joyce wrote:

And now, having finished my task, I claim that the account given in this three-volume work of the place-names of Ireland, their classification, analysis, and etymologies, is fuller, in the first place, and, in the second place, rests on surer foundations, than the history of the place-names of any other country. (Joyce 1913, viii)

This was no idle boast; Joyce’s admirably comprehensive survey of modern-day townland names has never been surpassed in its field though it is best used in conjunction with Flanagan (1981–2).

In a different category, namely the collation and identification of original forms of place-names as found in Irish manuscripts, John O’Donovan’s monumental edition of *The annals of the Four Masters*, mentioned above, provided the main inspiration for the single most important publication on the subject, Edmund Hogan’s *Onomasticon Goedelicum* (1910). Fr Hogan, Todd Professor at the Royal Irish Academy (Fig. 14.2), spent

ten years of his life compiling this work, completing it in his eightieth year. He, along with his helpers whom he lists in the introduction, assembled nearly 700 pages (in double columns and closely-set type) of place-names excerpted from Irish manuscript sources, many of which were unpublished at the time, and added numerous place-name identifications to supplement those of O’Donovan and others.

A significant aspect of Hogan’s work is its importance as a research tool for early and medieval Irish history. By following its references to the source, it often serves to link together information for the researcher that would otherwise remain unconnected. This has kept it central to medieval Irish studies as its references to sources have remained indispensable, whereas identifications of certain place and tribal names have been superseded by later scholarship. It is clear from Hyde (1917) and MacErlan (1917) that the debt that Irish studies owe to Fr Hogan and his *magnum opus* soon became considerable. The *Onomasticon* succeeded in putting place-name studies in this country on a new footing, especially with regard to the early written sources. Scholars of personal and tribal names owe a similar debt to Michael O’Brien for his *Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae* (O’Brien 1962).

Because the *Onomasticon Goedelicum* was first published over ninety years ago, it is universally accepted that the time has come to update this standard work of reference. This is the remit of the LOCUS project, based in the Department of Early and Medieval Irish, University College, Cork. Under the direction of Professor Pádraig Ó Riain and with the aid of a very generous grant from Toyota Ireland Ltd, this work has been ongoing since October 1996. The project began ten years earlier as ‘The Historical Dictionary of Irish Place and Tribal Names’ under the auspices of the Royal Irish Academy and University College, Cork, but was transferred exclusively to Cork in 1986. At the moment the necessary groundwork is nearing completion and it is hoped that the editing stage will be well in train during 2000. It is envisaged that the end result will be a revised edition of Hogan’s *Onomasticon* in fascicular form, along with a complete database of all collected place-names on CD-ROM.

#### INSTITUTIONS AND BODIES CONCERNED WITH PLACE-NAME RESEARCH

The Ordnance Survey of Ireland is an important source of information and publications on place-names (for its work see Andrews 1975; Ordnance Survey 1991; Ó Maolfabhail 1989, 1991, 1995). Building on a tradition that stretches back to O’Donovan, O’Curry and Petrie, among others, the Ordnance Survey has published (or facilitated the publication of) such important sources as the Ordnance Survey Name-Books, Memoirs and Letters.

The series of Ordnance Survey Memoirs published by the Institute of Irish Studies in Belfast (1990 to present) deserves special mention in this regard. An Coimisiún Logainmneacha (The Placenames Commission) was established by a warrant of appointment issued under the seal of the Minister of Finance in 1946. Its stated role was

- (1) to investigate the place-names of Ireland;
- (2) to establish the correct original Irish forms of those names, and
- (3) to publish lists of those place-names, in Irish and English, for official use.

The Commission had no full-time paid staff at its disposal, however. Its duties were changed to advisory only in 1955 and the research work was left to a permanent body of professionals attached to the Ordnance Survey (Ó Maolfabhail 1992, 1998; Mac Giolla Easpaig 1992).

This body, the Placenames Branch of the Ordnance Survey, in association with An Coimisiún Logainmneacha, published a series of booklets entitled *Ainmneacha Gaeilge na mbailte poist* relating to the postal district names of each province between 1960 and 1964. These were eventually brought together and published as one volume in 1969. The Placenames Branch followed this with *Logainmneacha as Paróiste na Rinne, Co. Phort Láirge* in 1975. The publication of the *Gazetteer of Ireland/Gasaitéar na hÉireann* in 1989 was another important step towards establishing the correct Irish forms of population centres and physical features. This was followed by the *Liostaí logainmneacha* series which contains the official Irish and English forms of the townlands, civil parishes and baronies of each county. Six volumes, (Limerick, Louth and Waterford (all 1991), Kilkenny (1993), Offaly (1994) and Monaghan (1996), have been issued to date as well as one volume (that for county Limerick (1990)) listing the historical evidence for the townlands. What is so important about this work is that place-name evidence and cartography complement one another; the importance of maps in this area of study should never be underestimated. An Coimisiún Logainmneacha has also produced a book, *The place-names of Ireland in the third millennium* (1992), which focuses on ways in which our rich place-name heritage can be preserved for future generations (see Ó Corráin 1992).

Part of the duties of the School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, established by a special act of government in 1940, was 'the collection and study of Irish place-names'. Before work in this area could be organized, however, An Coimisiún Logainm-

neacha (mentioned above) had been formed and onomastic study remained an ancillary discipline to the School's main research, especially the editing of texts. An exception to this was the important work carried out by Liam Price resulting in the publication by the School of *The place-names of county Wicklow* in seven volumes (Ó Cuív 1977). Mention must also be made of their role as publisher of Fr Paul Walsh's *The placenames of Westmeath* (1957). In 1964 the journal of An Cumann Logainmneacha (The Place-names Association), *Dinnseanchas*, began to appear. Over the next decade, edited by Éamonn de hÓir, the chief place-names officer of the Ordnance Survey, *Dinnseanchas* pursued a vigorous publishing programme that resulted in articles on individual place-names and place-name elements as well as a series of important contributions from the staff of the Ordnance Survey itself entitled 'As Cartlann na Logainmneacha', based on entries in their archival holdings. After the premature death of Éamonn de hÓir (for an appreciation of whom see Flanagan 1978), only one more number of the journal appeared before it ceased publication altogether in 1977.

Another project deserving of mention here is 'Coiste Logainmneacha Chorcaí' (The Cork Place-names Committee) under the supervision of Dr Éamon Lankford. To date, this body, with assistance from Cork County Council, FÁS and the Heritage Council, has collected over 30,000 place-names, many of them field-names, boundary-names and other minor names which are in danger of being lost forever through urbanization, disuse and the loss of an older generation for whom these were living, functional names. This very worthwhile, though labour-intensive, work should be duplicated in every county so that our living heritage will not disappear before our eyes. Guidelines for this type of study have already been laid down in Nicolaisen (1961).

#### PLACE-NAME RESEARCH IN NORTHERN IRELAND

One should not imagine that onomastic publication has been lacking in the north of Ireland. In the last century the first serial publication devoted to place-name research in Ireland was the *Bulletin of the Ulster Place-name Society (BUPNS)*. Though the first series of this journal lasted for only six years (from 1952 to 1957), it managed to publish over seventy pieces, comprising articles on place-names and place-name elements, book reviews, selections from the Ordnance Survey name-books as well as a cross-section of Ordnance Survey letters, along with sundry articles on dialect, toponymy and cartography. Publication of the journal came to an abrupt end with the sudden death of its editor, co-founder and major driving-force, John B. Arthurs (Seán Mac Airt), a lecturer in Celtic Studies at Queen's University, Belfast (Buchanan 1959; Ó Cuív 1958-61; Mac Cana 1958-9, 1960-1). Mac Airt is best known among

students of Irish history for his editions of *The annals of Inisfallen* (1944) and *The annals of Ulster* (1983) (with Professor Gearóid Mac Niocaill), though these represent only a fraction of his total scholarly output (Mac Cana 1958–9; Baumgarten 1986).

*BUPNS* remained defunct until 1978 when it was revived by one of Mac Airt's students, Deirdre Flanagan (née Morton), who had contributed much to the original volumes. It may be that the aforementioned demise of the journal *Dinnseanchas* inspired Flanagan to launch this second series of *BUPNS*, though it too was fated to have a short innings due to her untimely death in 1984 (for an appreciation and bibliography see Flanagan and Flanagan 1994, ix and 263–7). During the period of its publication (1978–82), however, it included important articles on all manner of subjects relating to name studies. The third coming of the Ulster Place-name Society was in 1986 with the launch of its new journal *Ainm*, under the editorship of Professor Ruairí Ó hUiginn. Seven volumes have been published with volume 8 promised for late 2000. Under Ó hUiginn, and present editor Dr Nollaig Ó Muraíle, it has actively encouraged place-name research in all parts of Ireland as well as ensuring that an outlet exists for the publication of this work. It is no exaggeration to say that Northern Ireland in general, and Queen's University, Belfast in particular, have led the way in onomastic publishing in Ireland.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the publications of the Northern Ireland Place-name Project, based at the Department of Celtic Studies, Queen's University, Belfast. It was established in 1987 to study the place-names of Northern Ireland appearing on the Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 scale map with a view to elucidating their origins, history and meaning. Under the general editorship of Professor Gerard Stockman (vols 1–6) and Dr Ó Muraíle (vol. 7) it has published seven volumes of detailed research on many of the place-names of counties Down, Antrim and Derry (see bibliography for further details). The invaluable archive of historical forms of Ulster place-names which has been built up during this work is stored at Queen's.

#### PERSONNEL AND PUBLICATIONS

Many other place-name workers deserve mention but only a selection of them may be named here. Along with the people enumerated above and in the bibliography, the following have all worked to various degrees on matters onomastic: historians (F. J. Byrne, E. MacNeill, K. W. Nicholls, and S. Ó Ceallaigh); linguists (G. B. Adams, L. Mac Mathúna, M. A. O'Brien, T. Ó Concheánainn, T. S. Ó Máille, T. F. O'Rahilly, O. Padel and J. Pokorny); professional place-name scholars (A. Mac An Bhaird, P. Ó Cearbhaill, S. Ó Cearnaigh and P. Ó Dálaigh); archaeologists (S. Ó Ríordáin and A. MacDonald), geographers (B.

Mac Aodha and P. O'Flanagan), and perhaps, most importantly, local historians and contributors to various local journals (S. Laoide, N. Lawless, M. Mac Cárthaigh, E. Mac Fhinn, D. Mac Íomhair, G. Mac Spealáin, H. Morris, L. Ó Buachalla, T. G. Ó Canainn, M. Ó Conalláin, B. Ó Dubhthaigh, R. Ó Foghludha, P. Ó Gallchóir, O. O'Kelly, P. Ó Niatháin, É Ó Tuathail, D. Piatt and M. Seoighe). The work of these scholars, among others, has increased our knowledge of Irish place-names and deserves to be read by all who are interested in Irish culture and heritage.

The mainstream Irish Studies journals, *Celtica*, *Éigse*, *Ériu*, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, *Peritia*, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, *Studia Hibernica* and their likes have all included important submissions on Irish place-names over the years. The contribution of regional journals should not be ignored either because many of them contain a wealth of detail on place-names pertaining to their local areas. This is especially true of the information garnered from native Irish speakers at the turn of the twentieth century or earlier regarding the folklore, meaning and pronunciation of certain place-names in districts where no native speakers now remain. Without the local journals these records might otherwise have been lost to us. Other important works on Irish place-names include Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha's *Tríocho-céad Chorca Dhuibhne* (1939), Canon Patrick Power's *The place-names of Decies* (1952) and Breandán Ó Ciobháin's *Toponomia Hiberniae* (1978–85), of which four volumes relating to south county Kerry have already been published.

#### INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

The last important onomastic periodical to be considered here is *Nomina*, which is published by the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland. The nineteen volumes to date of this journal deal with personal and place-name subjects relating to England, Scotland, Wales, The Isle of Man, Guernsey, Ireland and Scandinavia, which represents a very wide range. It is also a very important source of critical reviews of work published on the subject of names. The Society for Name Studies holds an annual conference where ideas and opinions are freely exchanged; a recent conference was held in Maynooth in April 1998.

The work of societies such as the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland and the International Committee of Onomastic Sciences (which produces the important journal, *Onoma*) helps to remind us of the international importance accorded to place-names. For example, the United Nations has held conferences regularly since 1967 on the standardization of geographical names. In an age of increasing communication, name standardization, which helps to avoid mistakes and yet preserves cultural differences, has

become a necessary adjunct to governmental and international planning. The important legal position accorded internationally to place-names is also reflected in their position with regard to the law in Ireland. The *Towns Improvement Clauses Act 1847*; the *Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907*; the *Local Government Act 1946*; the *Local Government Regulations 1956*; the *Road Traffic (Signs) Regulations 1962* and the *Place-Names (Irish Forms) Act 1973* all have legally enforceable aspects that deal with place-names (Ó Catháin 1992). For example, under the *Road Traffic (Signs) Regulations 1962*, all signposts most contain the Irish-language name forms along with their anglicized counterparts.

#### CASE STUDY

The history and descent of a particular place-name can often be quite complicated. On the face of it, a name such as Steeplestown (parish of Trim, county Meath) simply denotes a townland with a steeple. But when we look at its nineteenth-century Irish form, *Baile an Chloicthighe* (O'Donovan 1848–51, ii, 1182), we realize that the 'steeple', the last part of which fell around 1760, was an ancient round tower. The fact that an adjoining townland is named Tullyard enables us to identify the site as the *Cloictheach Telcha Aird* burned by Tighernán Ua Ruairc in 1171 (O'Donovan 1848–51, ii, 1180). After Ua Ruairc's raid it was garrisoned by 'foreigners' (presumably the Norman Hugo de Lacy's men) and *Gaill Tulcha Aird* feature in the 'Annals of Tigernach' (Stokes 1895–7) during the years 1175–7. But the round tower indicates an important early Christian settlement, and in the *Book of Leinster* (O'Sullivan 1983, ll. 51042–3) in a list of Irish saints are found the names *Ciaran Tulche Airdde* followed by *Ciaran Aird Heó*. The suspicion that one of the pair is a doublet of the other is borne out by versions of the same list in other manuscripts where the name reads *Ciaran Tulchi Airdde hEo* (Ó Riain 1985, 707.354–5 and fn.). Earlier in the same list we encounter *Brenaind Aird Eo* (Ó Riain 1985, 707.50).

So it appears that the original name was *Ard Eó* ('height of the yews') which later became *Tulach Airde hEó* and *Tulach Ard* ('high hillock'), part of which later became *Baile an Chloicthighe*/Steeplestown while the other part remained *Tulach Ard*/Tullyard.

#### CONCLUSION

The study of place-names contributes to our understanding of many different areas of human endeavour — cultural, historical, linguistic, legal, cartographic, geographic, to name just a few. It is an area of scholarship that combines the need for flair and precision to do full justice to the naming practices of bygone generations. Personal names and place-names are very much part of what we are, a genuine recognizable cultural link with our past. A recent publication, already referred to,

deals with names of places in Ireland in the third millennium (Ó Maolfabhail 1992), and it is worth remembering that many of those places still bear versions of names that were assigned to them around the beginning of the first millennium.

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