

# **Ordinance Letters 1838 Vol. 1**

**John O' Donovan**

**Attymass**

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The Name Attymass is applied to the Parish only. The local pronunciation of it is, *Āit Thigh' Meas'*.

There is no traditional information of any worth to be had respecting the object or even the locality to which this name was originally attached; neither is its signification known in this part of the country.

We find it written *Ath Tighe* in *Mheasaigh*, which signifies, the Ford of the House of *Meassach*, in the *Annals of the Four Masters* at the year A.D. 1225, where it is said that:-

*“O'Neill marched with a great army into Connaught, to assist the sons of Roderick O'Connor viz., Turloch and Hugh, at the request of Donn Oge Mag Oireachtaigh, Chief of Soil-Muireadhaigh. The son of Charles the Redhanded then went over to the English, who held their Court at Athlone. He was welcomed by them with great joy, and they entertained him for some time among them with much kindness. He then brought to his assistance, the Lord Chief Justice, and as many of the Chiefs of the English of Ireland as he thought sufficient. When the inhabitants of Maghatoi and of the Tuathas of Connaught had obtained intelligence of this muster, they fled into the Territory of Leyney with their cows and accoutrements, and left the sons of Roderick with only a few troops. The sons of Roderick O'Connor afterwards set out to Cill Ceallaigh and placed themselves behind their cattle. The sons of Roderick were at this time stationed near Loch-Mac-Fearadhach in Gleann-na-Mochart. Hugh, having consulted with his English, resolved to march through the Tuathas and plunder them. Accordingly, they passed on by a way through which it would never occur to the English to pass, i.e., through Fiodh Gathlaigh, until they arrived at Ath-Tighe in Messaigh, and plundered Cuil-Cearnadha, after having destroyed its people, some of whom fled to Dubhcanga, and were nearly all drowned.”*

As the exact locality of *Ath Tighe* in *Mheasaigh* cannot be ascertained from any local information, for the only local knowledge of it is, as the name of a Parish, it is necessary if it occurs in the course of making Irish extracts, to take down what is said of it. The passage from the *Annals* just given is not definite enough.

In the north of the Parish, and on the north margin of Ballymore Lake (*Loch a Bhaile Mhóir*) stands within a burying ground a small Church in ruins called *Killdermot*, which in Irish is locally pronounced *Cill Diarmat – Ceila Dermatii*.

The western gable has been totally pulled down; but its foundation is traceable; the side walls and eastern gable remain. It is six paces in length inside, by four in breadth; eighteen feet by twelve. There is a lancet window on the eastern gable, which is outside made of rudely cut stone so irregularly fixed as to leave its breadth unequal, which does not exceed eight inches in general. It is at least three and a half feet (4?) high on the outside. Under the stone composing its sides, is laid a rudely cut flag (stone) with an incision (excision gives a better idea) of three inches in depth, and six inches broad, corresponding to, and forming the lower part of the opening of the window. And over these stones is placed, on its edge, a rudely cut thin flag (stone), with an incision three inches in the deepest part, and of an arched form, and of a size corresponding to the breadth of the window.

The inside of this window is six feet high, and three and a half feet broad, in the lower part. It commences within two feet of the ground, and is continued in the same breadth to an equal height with the side walls. Then it is arched over with six stones, cut but rudely for the purpose.

The doorway must have been on the western gable, as there is none of the part remaining. The vestiges of another building, to the west of this little Church, are traceable. It was ten and a half yards long and somewhat wider than the Church. The demolished building is said to have been an Abbey, and the Cill in ruins, a Chapel attached to it.

Though this is looked upon as an old establishment there is no account to be had of its founder. Is there any mention in the life of Saint Dermot of a Church erected by him, or dedicated to him, in Cuil Cearnadha or Galeanga in Connaught.

An old burying place lies in the townland of Bunafinglass in the west of the Parish, where it is said there was formerly an Abbey. This is the only (most) frequented burying place in the Parish.

There is also an old burying place in Killgella Townland in the north of the Parish. It is called Cill Geille in Irish, and gave name to the townland. It is called Cill Geille in Irish, and gave name to the townland. What Geille is, I don't understand; I conjecture, however, that it may be a corruption of Greille, the r been left out; and that therefore it is possible that Ceathramhadh na Greillighi, mentioned in the contract above given, was the former name of Cill Geille.

In Glendawoo Townland (now in Irish Gleann Da Dhamh) in the east of the Parish, lies Killeen (Cillín) burying ground, where unbaptized children are now interred. It is set down in the Name Book of the Parish that in this graveyard there is a standing flag stone with a Cross cut on it, and another, covering a small grave, with a Cross rudely cut on it.

Archdall, in his Monasticon, under Killyn, places it in the Barony of Tirawley, and says:-

*“This Abbey was seized of the Chapel or Church of Attinmess, and a quarter of land called Dromskowlog and Carrownecargy, with the Tithes of the same.”*

The probability is that it was at the Killeen mentioned here this Abbey stood, and that Archdall should have placed it in the Barony of Gallen, for Attinmess is most undoubtedly Attymas, and Carrownecargy is now Carrick Townland in the centre of the Parish of Attymas. Dromskowlog I don't find in Attymas. It must be in some adjacent parish.

Tobbaraclon (called Tobar a Clún – na Cluana) a holy well, lies in Trianlaur Townland in north of the Parish.

Tobbar Patrick (Tobar Phatraic) a holy well, lies in Currower Townland, in the north extremity of the Parish.

I was informed there was Atty's holy well, in Irish, Tobar Athracha, in the Parish, but in what Townland I cannot tell. It lies, as well as I could learn, not far from the Parish Chapel, somewhere towards the mountain.

At the mearing of the Parish of Attymas with Breachmhaigh\* Townland in the Parish of Kilmoremoy in the Co. of Sligo, and immediately to the south east of the road leading from Ballina to Attymass, there is an ancient sepulchre. Stones are set in the ground on each side and at the ends to fence it in; on the part to the west there lies a greater stone, horizontally, supported by others set under it. The manner in which it is placed gives it, at a short distance, the appearance of a cromlech. But it is not suspended in pendulo; it is placed, like the great stone of the Sepulchral monument at Ardnamaol, at Ballina. The name for the sepulchre is Carnán, which signifies a heap. There is here a white thorn bush called Sgeach n-Dála, the White Thorn of the Dalys, a family who lived formerly at the place.

### OF CUIL CHEARNADHA

This ancient name is very well known in every part of this Country. It is in general agreed upon by the tradition of the people here that the ancient district of which it was the name is now comprised in the two Parishes of Kilgarvan and Attymas, both which are said to be exactly co-extensive with it.

We learn in Note 145 in p. 188. col. 2, to chapter 100 (par. 2?) of the Tripartite Life, that Calrigia of Cuilchernadan (i.e. Calrigia of Cuil-Chernadha) lay to the east of the Moy.

The words of the note, giving a description of the Western Bertlacii of Calrigia of Chule Cernadan, are:-

*“Bertlacii Occidentales (the Western Bertlacii) are the people of Connaught about the mouth of the river Moy (Muadi fluminis); and the Bertlacii of Calrigia of Cuil-Chernadan, who with respect to those are Eastern, (are) at the Eastern bank of the same river where it runs (down) into the ocean, as is collected from the same author (Joceline) speaking of the former (i.e. Bertlacii Occidentales) par. 2. c. 93. Of the latter (Bertlacii de Calrigia de Cuilchernadan) chapter 100.”*

It is necessary to remark here that calrigia of Cuilchernadan, as given in this note, is compound of Calrigia, a Latinized form of Calraighe the name of the inhabitants, and of Cuilchernadan, an incorrect form of Cuile Chearnadha, the name of the district inhabited by the Calraighe, who were descendants of Lughaidh Cal.

Cuilraighe, the name of the inhabitants, might be frequently used as the name of the district; but when it was necessary to distinguish it from the other Cailrighes (Calrees) the real name of the district, that is Cuil Chearnadha, was postfixed to it. The same may be supposed to happen to other Calrees, and other names of similar origin and formation.

We have no document which would let us know who the Bertlacii were. Does Mac Firbis mention the Bertlacii or trace them to any origin?

We now collect from local knowledge and written authority, that Cuil Chearnadha lies to the east of the Moy and from the observations made we collect that Calree and Cuil Chearnadha applied to the same extent of country.

\*The people place this Breachmhaighe Townland in Kilmoremoy Parish. There is a Townland called Bealach-Breach-Mhaighe in Castleconnor Parish. Are they the same?

We collect two other grand features from the Irish poem just quoted above, viz:-

First:-

O'Bhél-Easa na neas n-glan,  
Feadh na Tuaithe nar' túbhadh  
Go Brosnaigh is teann tuile  
Far 'Cobsaidh (do chosain) Ceann Callraighe.'

'From Bel-Easa of the clear cataracts,  
To Brosnach River of impetuous torrents,  
Extends this Tuath, which never was subdued\*  
But bravely held by Calree's noble Chief.'

\*O'Dowd has a great part of it, still it was never subdued.

Bel-Easa is now the Irish name of Foxford Town, three miles due south of Attymas Parish. And the Brosnach River rises near Bearnas Loch Tailt, and falls into the Moy at Bunree opposite Belleek Castle.

Second:-

The prose account prefixed to the poem of Mc Firbis of 1417, defines Cuil Chearnadha thus:-

'O Bhéul atha na nidheadh  
Go bealach breuchmhaighe.'

'From Beul atha na nidheadh  
To Bealach Breuchmhaighe.'

Beul atha na nidheadh, is a ford on the Abhainn Buidhe (Yellow River) at Moorbrook in the Parish of Toomore, and about a mile from Foxford. This river is said to have its source in Glendawoo Lake in the east of Attymas Parish and to join the Moy at Bunnafinglas in the west of the same Parish. Bealach Breachmhuighe is now the name of a Townland in the Parish of Castleconnor, and lying east of Ardnaree.

This ford lies on the river where it crosses a road, which though old is still much frequented, and leads from Foxford to Ballina in that direction. Large stepping stones are placed in it, which the people cross from one side to the other. Its exact situation is at Moorbrook to the south east of Moorbrook House. Beul-atha-na-nidheadh is known as the name of this ford over all the country.

We have now from the poem, Foxford on the south and Brosnach on the north, two remarkable features limiting this district.

And we have next in the prose account Beul-atha-na-nidheadh near Foxford, and Bealach Breachmhuighe to the north.

Though the names in these descriptions differ, there is however very little difference, if any, in the extent defined by them, as is to be seen on considering the situations of the places.

Having fixed these limits, we adduce from the poem of Mc Firbis of 1417, an unquestionable evidence of the western boundary:-

O'Bheul atha conga cruaidh  
Na fearainn (fearoinn) siar go sean mhuidh  
Ag O'Cuinn is 'go O'Morainn mear.

From Beul atha conga to the Moy westwards,  
Lay the lands of O'Quinn and of O'Moran.

Beul-atha-cunga, is now the name of a townland anglicised Bellacong which lies in the centre of the Parish of Attymas, a quarter of a mile north of the Village of Bunnyfinglass.

O'Quinn and O'Moran are enumerated among the Taoiseachs (Chiefs) of Cuil Chernadha, whose territory the words just quoted clearly define.

The Moy was therefore, the western boundary of Cuil Chearnadha (Cuil Kerny) which probably extended in the opposite direction as far as Leyney in Sligo.

In the Tripartite Life par. 2. c. 100. p. It is said that:-

*"When Saint Patrick was bringing to an end and journeying through the circuit of Connaught, the men of Calrigia of Culecharnadan (Calree of Cuil Kerny) laying snares for him, met him, and by the clangor of their arms and shields and by the noise and clamors raised by them, endeavoured to terrify the Holy Man of God and his companions, and expel and rout them from their own territory. To whom the Holy Man said what he saw in spirit. 'Because you raise up in arms against the unarmed, and you endeavour to put to flight from your territory the messengers of peace and salvation, you yourselves and your posterity shall, in the day of war, (battle) be driven like sheep to flight, and turn your backs to the enemy'."*

*"They, hearing these sayings, were very much astonished, and doing penance for their temerity, all excepting five falling on their knees, asked pardon. The compassionate man was silent for a short (time) as if deliberating, and by and by, says to them with a presaging and consolatory oracle 'what the Lord has spoken through my mouth will remain fixed, but however, because you humbly demand pardon for (of) your error, beyond the number five of you, although all the Connacians pursue you, shall fall in no conflict' and the event proves that this oracle is continually fulfilling."*

We find another notice of Cuil-Cearnadha in the Annals at the year 1412. For the notice of it at the year 1225, see it given above.

*"A.D. 1412. Richard Barrett made a predatory incursion into Cuil-Cearnadha, but the noble-men of the country over took him and drove him into the River Moy, in which he was drowned; and many of his people were also drowned; and others were taken prisoners."*

I have made extracts for myself relating to the north part of Tirawley; I shall, therefore, proceed to Killala on Monday, and afterwards pass onto Ballycastle.

Your obedient humble servant,

T.O'Connor.

T.A. Larcom, Esq., etc., etc.,