

# Origins of some Armagh place-names

by Gerry Oates

The following article outlines the meanings of some of the place-names found in Armagh today. The places referred to occur within the Manor of Armagh and include the names of the various districts within the city and the adjacent townlands. Many of the old division names within the city have been lost or replaced by new administrative nomenclature that hides their original form. The term **Corporation** which covers the urban district of Armagh comprises a number of townlands which can only be found on older maps and leases relating to the tenure of land. Some of these names have survived in the names of streets and housing estates but their original boundaries are often obscure.

Most of the names dealt with have their origins in the Gaelic language; some can be traced back more than 1,000 years and, in the rare case, to pre-Christian times. Sources for the material below can be found in the historical research of Thomas Ashe, T.G.F. Paterson, James Stuart and Michael Glancy; and in the place-names' research of J.B. Arthurs, Kay Muhr, and Mícheál Ó Máinnín in the publications of the Ulster Place-Name Society and Seanchas Ard Mhacha. I am also grateful to Sean Barden who provided much information on districts within the city and personal copies of old maps.

**Cregagh** is in the townland of **Cargagh** 'rocky place'; this is from the Irish **car-raigeach** 'rocky' which also lends its name to **Rock Road** in the same area.

**Umgola** – this place-name is the result of a scribal error by map-makers. The original name of the townland was **Drumgola** from the Irish 'the fork of the hill-ridge'. In older maps place-names were often broken up when the map reached the margin, so Dr- appeared

on one page while - umgola appeared on the following page. In subsequent maps Umgola without the prefix was recorded as the official name. Gabhal is a 'fork' and refers to the meeting of the Callan the small river which provides the water jumps on Farmacaffley racecourse which occurs in the townland now called **Umgola**.

**Callan River** – In Irish the river is known as **An Challain** 'the noisy one' which probably refers to the early stretches of the river, particularly in Keady where it tumbles over a rocky outcrop and around Tassagh where the level of the river falls over a number of rapids.

**Tullymore** is from **Tulach Mhór** 'large mound' but often referred to an 'assembly point' where important gatherings were held; its proximity to Navan would seem to add significance.

**Drumarg** – the original Irish of this is **Druim Mairge** 'hill of misery'. There is no indication in the records as to why this place earned such an unfortunate name, but the name is on record since 1245.

**Mullacreevy** – from Irish **Mullach Craoibhe** 'the wooded hilltop' and a time when much of the area was covered by woods.

**Ballycrummy** – In Irish it is **Baile Uí Cromtha** 'Crummy's townland'. According to MacLysaght, the foremost scholar on family histories, there is a 17th century record of the name **Ó Cromtha** in Armagh.

**Legar Hill** – from Dutch **leger** 'encampment' and tradition has it that the Duke of Schomberg, a general in King William's army in 1690, pitched camp there on his way to the Boyne. **Duke's Grove** across the way is also named from the same duke.

**Lurgyvallen** – is the name of the

townland in which **Legar Hill** and **Duke's Grove** are situated. The Irish form is **Lorg Uí Mhealláin** 'Mallon's long low hill', as the territory was awarded to the Ó Mallons by the Archbishops of Armagh in the medieval period. Alongside the Callan below Duke's Grove lies **Altavallen** which represents the Irish **Allt Uí Mhealláin** 'O Mallon's Glen' which has also given its name to a nearby housing development.

**Culdee** – the housing estate has been named in honour of the ancient Celtic monks, **Céile Dé** 'companions of God' who had a habitation nearby in **An Diseart** 'the secluded retreat', now known as **The Desert**, part of which has been re-anglicised as **The Hermitage** on account of its early monastic associations. The Culdee monks are again remembered in the townland name **Kennedies** in which the village of Milford is situated; the modern name is a corruption of **Céile Dé** in which **l** was misread as **n**.

**Drumbreda - Druim Brighde** in Irish means Brigid's Hill and is named after St. Brigid of Faughart, one of the three patron saints of Ireland. **Drumbreda** is possibly a later anglicized Gaelic rendering of **Brigid's Hill**.

**Drumcarn** - in Irish **Druim Cairn** 'the ridge monument'. In ancient Ireland a **carn** 'pile of stones' was often raised on a hilltop to honour a dead chieftain or hero.

**Banbrook** is a corruption of the original **Bondbrook** from 1740 and was owned by the **Bond** family who lived in Drumsill House nearby.

**Drumsill - Druim Sail(each)** is the Gaelic version which means 'Willow Hill'. In English the final element has been discarded; the townland also names some streets in the nearby Longstone estate.

**Longstone** takes its name from the ancient standing stone situated at the rear of Longstone House. It stands 5½ feet high but nothing is known of its origin.

**Mullinure** is the townland in which Longstone and the St. Luke's complex are situated. In Gaelic it is **Mullach an Iúir** 'the hilltop of the yew tree'; in ancient times yew trees played an important role in Druidic ceremonies and very often a sacred tree on a hilltop was chosen for the purpose.

**Cavanacaw** - the original version is **Cabhán na Cáithe** 'hill of the chaff', a place where farmers once winnowed corn on windy days. The word **cabhán** means 'low hill' and the townland of Cavanacaw lies between the Newtownhamilton and Newry Roads and takes in the housing development of the same name.

**Edenaveys** - **Éadan na bh-Fiach** means 'hill-brow of the ravens'. **Éadan** 'brow, forehead'

occurs frequently in places-names to signify a gentle hill slope and is generally represented in English by the prefix **Eden-**. The original townland, as noted in the Cromwellian Inquisition of 1657, was made up of two parts and explains the final **-s** in the English version.

**Drummad** comes from the Gaelic **Droim Fada** 'long ridge' and accurately describes the long low hill ridge which houses the Army barracks at present.

**Mullyloughran** - the Irish form is **Mullach Luacharnach** 'rushy hilltop'.

**Luacharnach** means 'place abounding in rushes'.

**Aghamoat** - this is the smallest townland in Co. Armagh (with the exception of Coney Island Flat) and covers a mere 8 acres. It lies between the Rock Road and the Keady Road and occupies the site acquired for the new Armagh Integrated College. In Irish it is **Achadh Mochta** 'Mochta's Field' and was formerly Church lands and is mentioned in a Cal-



*Mullyloughran means the rushy hilltop and this recent photo shows they are still very much in evidence.*

endar of Papal documents dated 1245. Mochta was an early Celtic monastic saint c.535.

**Farmacaffley** is known to many as the site of the annual Point-to-Point race meeting in February. In 1703 Ashe recorded it as **Farren McCaphally** which is a close approximation of its original Irish form, **Fearann Mhic Eachmhilidh** 'MacCaughley's Land'. The family is a branch of the Magennis clan that once ruled the Iveagh territory of West Down.

**Ballyheridan** is situated close to the city at the junction of the Newtownhamilton and Keady Roads. The name is an anglicised form of **Baile Uí Shirideáin** 'Sheridan's farmstead'. The Sheridan family is usually associated with Co. Longford, but they were an erenagh family, which means they held charge of Church lands and might explain why they had lands in Armagh. The surname is still found in the city.

**Ballinahone** is the name of two townlands bordering on the city boundary. **Baile na hAbhainn** which is pronounced exactly as it sounds in English represents 'land by the river'. **Ballinahone Beg** lies to the west between Milford and Rock Road takes its name from the nearby Callan River. **Ballinahone More** takes its name from the river of the same name and lies south of the city between Edenaveys and Ballinahone/Orangefield. In Irish the adjectives **beag** and **mór** mean 'little' and 'large'.

**Aghanore** townland lies close to the city boundary and crosses the Moy Road just beyond the Callan River. It is **Achadh an Óir** 'field of gold' in Irish which is possibly due to the fertile land there which would produce fields of ripe golden crops in autumn. It is mentioned in a Calendar of Papal documents dated 1245.

**Alexander** is named for Field Marshal Viscount Alexander of Tunis who commanded the British evacuation of Dunkirk in 1939 and later distinguished himself in the North African campaign. He was the third son of the 4th Earl of Caledon.

**Carrickaloughran** is a small townland on the city boundary adjacent to Lurgycullen which commemorates one of the oldest native families in Armagh, the Loughrans.

**Carraig Uí Luachráin** means 'O Loughran's rock'; the surname has long been associated with the city, as the family was prominent in ecclesiastical affairs in the Middle Ages. Thomas O Loughran, Dean of Armagh, died in 1416.

**Dean's Bridge** - The Cromwellian Inquisition of 1657 describes a parcel of land on the outskirts of the city on which was built **The Dean's House** called **Tulledeganach** which is from the Irish **Tulach Deagánach** 'Hill of the Dean'. On later maps it is recorded

as *The Deanery* and is adjacent to the spot where the Portadown Road crosses the Ballinahone River known as *Dean's Bridge*.

**Carricktroddan** names a townland close to the city boundary on the opposite side of the Ballycrummy Road from Legar Hill. It commemorates the name of an Oriel family, *Ó Treodáin* (Trodden), which is rarely met outside Armagh. In Irish *Carraig Uí Threodáin* means 'Trodden's Rock'.

**English Street** – Early medieval records indicate an area of the city called *Bóthar an Trian Sasanach* in Irish, 'the road of the English third', which has been identified with the lower part of Abbey Street, exactly where the building housing St. Patrick's Trian stands today and including the present-day English Street. It derived its name from the English merchants and students who inhabited that district.

**Drummanmore** is based on Irish *druim*, literally 'a back', but in place-names is always applied to a 'hill ridge'. In this instance Drumman is the diminutive form 'little hill ridge', but is paradoxically qualified by the adjective *mór* 'big' and means 'the big little hill ridge'. This is to distinguish it from the nearby **Drummanbeg** with the adjective *beag* 'small' and means 'the little hill ridge which is smaller than Drummanmore'.

**Parkmore** (or *Demesne*) describes the area included in The Palace Grounds.

*Páirc Mhór* in Irish means 'large

pasture field' and reflects the use made of this extensive area now enjoyed as a golf course

**Navan** is the *Emain Macha* which was the royal court of the ancient kings of Ulster. There are a number of theories as to the meaning of the name and one suggests that *Macha*, the legendary queen, gave birth to twins 'emain' there. It was later called *An Eamhain 'The Navan'*, as many Armagh people still do today. The *n* of the first element was added to the second part in which Irish *mh* is sounded like *v* to approximate the current pronunciation. The name **Navan** is perhaps among the oldest recorded place-names in Ireland, as scholars reckon that it is represented by the reference *Isamnion* which appears on the Greek geographer Ptolomy's map of around AD 150. The Latin version of the name is *Emania* which is commemorated in *Emania Terrace*.

**Lisanally** is listed in the Cromwellian Inquisition of 1657 as *Liosconalia* which seems to be an anglicised attempt to transliterate *Lios Chon Allaidh* 'the fort of the wolf'. The literal meaning of *cú allaidh* is 'wild hound' i.e. 'wolf' but in Old Irish designations with *cú* were often adopted as personal names and so *Cú Allaidh* 'wolf' refers to the original settler of the site. *Lios* in place-names means 'the space about a farmhouse usually enclosed by a rampart' and in translation it becomes 'fort'. In language development the initial *C* of *Con* 'of the

hound' is often elided and would produce a sound resembling the current pronunciation of *Lisanally*. The grammatical structure of the place-name suggests that it was formed prior to the 9th century.

**Knockamell** - from the early 17th century spellings *Knockyamoyell*, *Kockamoyell* and *Knocke-Iamoyle* this seems to be an anglicised rendering of *Cnoc Uí Ághmaill* 'O Hamill's Hill'. The Hamills were a branch of the Cineál Eoghain (the O'Neill connection) and were numerous in Ulster, particularly in Tyrone and Armagh. From 12C they were notable poets and ollaves to the O'Hanlons, the lords of Orior. They were also to be found in warlike as well as literary activities, for *Donnell Ó Hammoyle* was among the adherents of Rory O'Donnell at end of 16th century. **Knockamell** occupies the hill behind the College of Further Education on which the Sports Centre is situated. (see illustration below)

**Ballymackillmurry** which lies to the north of the city in the civil parish of Grange was the territory of the family *Mac Giolla Muru* in 1609. Members of the family are listed as Armagh clergy in the 15th century, and a record of O'Neill encroachment on their lands in 1407 reveals that they had been granted land by the Archbishop as far back as 1264. In 1278 the Register of Archbishop Fleming records the renting of pasture to *Rory Makillamuru*. There is no record of the surname



View of Knockamell hill from Knockadrain hill

**Mackillmurry** in recent times and it is thought to be extinct, but there is some speculation that the surnames **Mackle** and **Gilmore**, both found in the area, might be related. Arthurs, in his *Place-Names of Armagh*, suggests that the townland of **Tullyelmer** also contains a reference to the same family in the second element of the place-name which appears to be a reduced version of **Mac Giolla Muru**, which would make it ‘Mackillmurry’s Hill’.

**Tullyargle** is from **Tulaigh Aragal** ‘the hill of the oratory churches’; its earlier form was Tír na nAragal ‘the land of the oratory churches’, presumably the land set aside for the upkeep of the churches.

**Ballaghy**, in the vicinity of Navan, is from **Baile Uí Eochaidh** ‘O Haughey’s townland’.

The personal name **Eochaidh** ‘horseman’ was the second most common name in early Irish society and the modern surname **Haughey** is derived from it. Haughey is still relatively common in Armagh and the county.

**Niall’s Crescent** perpetuates the name of **Niall mac Aodha**, king of Tara, who was drowned in the Callan River in AD 846 and as a consequence is referred to as **Niall Caille** ‘Niall of the Callan’ by historians.

**Daire’s Willows** is the name of a small housing development off Cathedral Road and is named for **Daire**, a local chieftain, who offered Patrick the land to build his first church in Armagh. Why the housing developed was described as ‘Willows’ is not certain, but perhaps it stems from the notion that the original name of the height on which the old cathedral now stands was described as **Ard Saileach** ‘Willow Height’ (later **Ardsallagh**) in various accounts of Patrick’s life

**Tullyworgle** appears to be a corruption of **Tulach Uí Mhuireagáin** ‘Morgan’s Hill’. Morgan is often associated with Wales and Cornwall and is a very old Celtic name, but in Ireland it is derived from **Ó Muireagáin** and was the name of one of the chief families of the ancient territory of Teffia (Longford, Westmeath). In the 16th century the

name was most numerous in Armagh and Down.

**Charlemont** is the last ‘bastion’ in Co. Armagh before crossing into Tyrone territory. In 1602 Charles Blount, better-known as Lord Deputy Mountjoy, built a fort there on the right bank of the Blackwater “to be another thorn in the side of Hugh O Neill, Earl of Tyrone”. He named it after himself **Charlemont** and it has since given its name to part of the East Mall – **Charlemont Place**.

**Drelincourt** is the name of The Church of Ireland primary school in Ballinahone and also of a small housing development adjacent to Navan Street commemorating **Sir Peter Drelincourt**, Dean of Armagh 1691-1722, and his wife who founded the school. They had a daughter, Lady Primrose, after whom **Primrose Hill** was named.

**Ballyrath** which lies between the city and Killyleagh is from an original **Baile Uí Raith** ‘Ó Rath’s townland’ and is based on a relatively rare surname almost exclusively confined to Armagh, Rath. The name appears several times in old documents relating to Church lands in Armagh, for instance, in the text of the Inquisition of 1609 relating to the Plantation Of Ulster it states that,

*the sept of Rathes (Ó Raith), and their ancestors, time out of mind, have been seized of Ballyra ... paying out yearly, to the Lord Archbishop of Armagh ... ten shillings.*

**Tullygoonigan** represents **Tullach Uí Dhonnagáin** (‘Donegan’s Hill’) in Irish. **Donegan (Ó Donnagáin)** is based on the Old Irish personal name **Donnagán** (a diminutive form **donn** ‘brown’) and is the name of a number of unrelated septs in Cork, Tipperary, Roscommon and Monaghan. The name is rare in Armagh but the townland name suggests they were once resident there. The vowel **o** in the surname was apparently pronounced **oo** in the 16/17th centuries as can be seen from older spellings of Ballinahone as Ballinahoon and Ballinahune.

**Ballymorán (Baile Uí Mhóráin)** ‘Moran’s townland’ lies in the parish of Lisnadill. The family name is no longer prominent in Armagh or the county, but it was Church property and the earliest

reference to it appears as **Baleomauran** in a Calendar of Papal Documents confirming a grant made in 1245.

**Ballybrannan (Baile Uí Bhranáin)** – ‘Brannon’s townland’) is derived from the family name **Ó Branáin** ‘grandson of **Bran** - raven’ and commemorates the family which was a Cenél Eoghain (a territory of the O Neills) sept. The name is usually anglicised **Brennan** and is found mostly in Fermanagh and Monaghan. The nearby **Mullybrannon (Mullach Uí Bhranáin)** ‘Brannan’s summit’) is found in the Tyrone portion of Clonfeakle parish. This family is often confused with the **O Brennan (Ó Braonáin)** clan from Kilkenny.

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