

# Le Chêile

COMMUNITY MAGAZINE



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## EDITORIAL

Seven years ago, in March 2014, we published an article in Le Chéile which was based on the Annals of Mac Fírbis, which was published in 1643 and translated by John O'Donovan in 1860. We are re-publishing it in this issue; See page 5. It deals with a well which never froze even in the most severe frosts and was in association with a little hill, the Cruachán Claonta, which was deemed to have magical powers. It was believed that if the Leinster-men held their council of war here before going into battle they could not be defeated.

Following on the cutting off of the sides of the Motte near the Liffey Bridge in Clane using a JCB, we were bringing it to public attention that evidence was exposed that the Cruachán Claonta was covered by the Motte and that it had been restructured by the Normans in the late 12th Century in their construction of the Motte. Our concern was to pass this evidence on to future generations.

We recently acquired knowledge that in 1925, 96 years ago, a lady by the name of Maud Joynt published a book entitled "The Golden Legends of the Gael" in which she made reference to the Cruachán Claonta and the beliefs and practices associated with it. We look forward to acquiring a copy of this book, perhaps when the pandemic permits and libraries re-open nationally and across the sea. We will quote any points of interest which it may contain.

## THE DOWN SURVEY

The following is an extract from the Down Survey or Cromwell's Survey of 1654-1656. We include the pages relating to the survey of the Barrony of Clane and Clane Parish. We first

THE SURVEY OR ESTIMATE of the Barrony of Clane taken by us whose names are hereafter subscribed by virtue of a Commission from the Right honourable the Lord Deputy and Council bearing date the xxth of September 1654.

### East

The said Barrony of Clane meareth on ye East from a place called Capduffe to the Bridge of Clane over ye River of Liffie from thence to the Ford of Newtowne (old name for Millicent) in ye said River of Liffie from thence to ye Ford of Castlekeely in ye aforesaid River of Liffie from thence to ye Bridge of Carough over the said River from thence to a Bush called Skanesleboy on the Lands of Halverstown, beyond the aforesaid River of Liffie all which said mears divides ye Barony of Clane from ye Barony of

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### EDITOR'S DEADLINE

The deadline for receipt of material for the **June** issue of Le Chéile is

**Monday 24th May**

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Naas on ye East as aforesaid.

### **West**

On the West the aforesaid Barrony on Clane meareth from the River of Casheneskealy to a lake commonly called Cantwells Lake, from thence to a Lake commonly called Gallyglasse Lake through ye Redde Bogg which said Meares divides ye Barrony of Clane from the Barrony of Connell, on the West aforesaid the aforesaid Barrony meareth from ye said Lake called Gallyglasse Lake, to ye River called Blackwater from thence to a Lake commonly Loughneterrinney, from thence to a Brooke commonly called Glashenvechen which said Meares divides the Barrony of Clane aforesaid from the Barrony of Carberry on the west side.

### **North**

On ye North ye aforesaid Barrony of Clane meareth from ye aforesaid place called Glashenvechen to a place called Glashengollane, from thence to a place called Agheenegeeragh, from thence to a River called Oweene Coshy, from thence to a Ford commonly called Aghglashefae from thence to a Land called Boreneputteragh from thence to a Streame called Shrohane Clounagh,

from thence to a Mount called Moteneegonagh from thence to a Ford called Blackfoard neere Maynham from thence to a Ford called Aghevoddyvonine, and from thence by a streame which leads to the River of Liffie all which said Meares divides the Barrony of Clane from ye Barrony of Ikeaty and Oughterrenny on ye Northside.

### **South**

On ye South ye said Barrony of Clane meareth from ye aforesaid Bush called Skanesleboy on ye lands of Halverstowne to a place called the Black Bogg neere ye Lands of Sigginstowne in ye Barrony of Naas and from thence to ye Foard of Cashskealy in ye aforesaid River of Liffey, all which said Meares divides the aforesaid Barrony of Clane from ye Barronyes of Naas & Connell on the South side.

### **Soyle**

The land of the aforesaid Barrony of Clane is good dry and fertile fitt for corne of all sorts. The pastureable ground is good for Cattle of all sorts and ye Bogg in some pts of ye Barrony is fit for firing.

### **Rivers**

The River of Liffey is ye only River rising out of or running through ye aforesaid Barrony of Clane.

### **Fords**

There is in ye aforesaid Barrony of Clane, six Foards in ye River of Liffey Vitz The Foards of Newtown, (Millicent) The Foard of Castlekeely, The Foard of Cashenskealy, The Foard of Aghlashhefae, Blackfoard, and a Ford called Aghvoddyvonyne.

### **Manners**

There is in the said Barrony of Clane two Manners Vitz the Mannor of Clane and the Mannor of Timochoe.

### **Meares of the Parish of Clane**

THE SAID PARISH OF CLANE Meareth on ye East from ye Lands OF Capduffe to ye Bridge of Clane and thence to ye Lands of Barrettstowne from thence to ye Lands of Hoarestowne, on ye West from ye lands of Currihills to the lands of Stablerstowne, from thence to Borenepoutteragh from thence to Shrohane Clounagh On ye North from ye Lands of Shrohane Clunagh to a Mount called Mottenecona from thence

to Blackford neere Maynham from thence to Aghvoddevonin from thence to the Lands of Capduffe. And on ye South the said Parish of Clane meareth from the lands of Hoarstowne to ye lands of Fleshtowne from thence to ye Lands of Longtowne & from thence to ye Lands of Carrihills aforesaid.

### **Lands in ownership in Clane Parish**

The total number of acres in ownership in Clane Parish was estimated to be 1,358 1/4 acres. Of this 1,1335 1/4 acres was deemed profitable and 203 acres unprofitable. This was in the ownership of twenty individuals. Three were deemed Protestant and seventeen Papist.

It was a time when many re-located to the Continent in order to protect their land, many taking up service with the French army. One individual who was returned a Protestant by a Jury was known to have attended Mass and to have fought with the rebels. He is said to have died a Papist and bred up all his children likewise.

## THE NAME CLANE AND RELATED ISSUES

When Comerford published his History of the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin in 1883 he made reference to a range of written works, which included the Annals of the Four Masters (1616), and the Annals of Mac Firbis (1643). The latter, which was translated from old Irish and annotated by John O'Donovan in 1860, is quoted at length in relation to the Parish of Allen. With regard to the Parish of Clane Comerford relied heavily on the Four Masters. "In ancient records the name of this place is given in **two** forms; Claen-Damh, i.e., "the field of oxen" and Claen-Ath, i.e., "the field of the Ford". See p. 98. (Claen would derive from *Cluain* but the vowel change is a problem according to experts, the vowel being the least likely part of the word to change.) The Four Masters are quoted by Comerford on p.100, using the Claen-Ath form, in reference to a battle fought in A.D. 702. On the same page a **third** form Clae-nadh comes up, without comment from Comerford, when quoting the Four Masters in reference to "Banbhan, Abbot of Clae-nadh, who died in A.D. 777". The lack of clarity around the origin of the name Clane is clearly acknowledged.

Mac Firbis was from County Clare but by some great coincidence one of the three ancient vellums which he transcribed in 1643 makes mention of Clane. The extract relates to the Battle of Allen, in which 9,000 Leinster-men fought 21,000 Ulster-men in a dispute regarding tribute ('protection money') which the Leinster-men were refusing to hand over. The different annals disagree on the exact year of this battle, ranging between 718 and 722, but the

latter is believed to be the true year. It was a bloody battle and the losses were great on both sides. The following is a quote from O'Donovan's 1860 translation of Mac Firbis, with the footnotes included (p. 39). [Those interested in obtaining the source may do so by looking up *Annals of Ireland*, published free of charge on the Internet by Columbia University.]

*" - - With respect to the Leinster-men, they repaired to Cruachan Claenta', for the Leinster-men would not be defeated if they should hold their council there, and proceed from thence to battle. They proceeded thence to Dinn-Canainn<sup>2</sup>, and thence to the battle.*

*On the following morning the battalions of both sides met : nine thousand of the Leinster-men, and twenty one thousand of Leth-Chuinn. Vigorously and fiercely was this battle fought on both sides, and all showed equal fight."*

O'Donovan's footnote: \_\_\_\_\_

*"Cruachan Claenta' -i.e. the round Hill of Clane, situated about five miles to the north-east of Allen, where this battle was fought. The Leinster-men believed that whenever they could hold their council of war here, they should not be defeated. The origin of this belief is not yet discovered, nor is this superstition noticed in "Leabhar na gCeart", among the Geasa and Urganthae of the Kings of Leinster.*

*Dinn-Canainn<sup>2</sup> -now Duncannon, nearly midway between Clane & the Hill of Allen"*

In O'Donovan's work the original Gaelic and the English translation, including his foot-notes, are given on oppositely facing pages. It is odd that O'Donovan should have changed the spelling from "**Cruachán Claonta**" as it is spelled in the original Irish

text on page 38 . According to Dinneen's Dictionary a *Cruachán* is a little rick or stack, a small heap; a little hill or mound. (no mention of a 'round hill'), while *claonta* means inclined or sloping. One has to ask the question: should this not have been translated as the *Slanted Hill* rather than the *Round Hill of Clane*? This leads one to ask therefore is it not possible that this hill gave Clane its name rather than the converse, as suggested by O'Donovan? There is no evidence that O'Donovan actually identified the hill in question, unless his use of the term "round Hill" might carry this implication: - perhaps identifying it with the "Motte". This Norman structure, as identified by the O.S., would have involved considerable reconstruction some 450 or more years later. The "Motte", which is located close to Alexandra Bridge on the Liffey outside Clane, would be an excellent candidate in any attempt to pin down the location of the ancient rallying point where the Leinster-men were in the practice of assembling before going into battle. The fact that it is recognised as the burial place of Mesgegra, King of Leinster, who was killed there by Conall Cearnach in 33 A.D. while seeking sanctuary, would greatly strengthen the case. Also, O'Donovan's question with regard to the "*origin of this belief ... or superstition*" can now be reasonably answered, as the closely associated well (Sunday's Well) has since been officially listed by the Geological Survey as a Thermal Spring. From the earliest pagan times it would have attracted curiosity and attention for the fact that it never froze, even in the most severe frost; it 'steamed' in the coldest periods of winter; the outflow tidally responded to the phases of the moon; it constantly bubbled and the outflow sup-

ported a brilliant green surface of duck-weed both winter and summer.

As is almost invariably the case with thermal springs, they tend to have gravel hills closely associated with them. Good examples are St. Patrick's Well and the Hill of Ardrass, on the road between Celbridge and Barberstown, Brideswell to the north of Kilcock , St. Peter's Well and the once closely associated Motte (now demolished) to the west of the Range in Donadea. The explanation of course lies in the effect the warm waters would have had in locally melting out the gravels from the ice above them during the Ice-age.

During the 1980s I received a phone call from Con Costello one afternoon to say that he was in Waterford for the day but had received a number of calls to inform him that the Motte in Clane was actively being demolished with a JCB and would I go down immediately and intervene. On my arrival at the site, whether by coincidence or otherwise, the work stopped. The land owner indicated to the driver that that would do. He turned to me and remarked: "There we are now -all finished and isn't it all the better for it?" The Motte had been tightly cut back all around creating vertical sides of maybe 7 feet in height (see photographs), while also removing the surrounding ditch and embankment. The long tapering tail which had extended westwards beyond the circular ditch was also removed together with Sunday's Well. This tail had been about equal in length to the diameter of the Motte. The aim of the exercise had obviously been to extend the area of level ground being used to ring horses. The site remained in this condition for many years until it was sold on for construction of the Cois Abhain apartment complex. During this operation the builders back

-filled the base of the Motte all around, covering in the well as they did so. The backfill is less steep than the original Motte, extending to a greater outreach.

The sketch provided (p. 8) attempts to relate the original Cruachán Claonta and the Norman Motte which was reconstructed from it, with the thermal spring (Sunday's Well) included. The point has already been made that this pre-Norman structure may well be at the very origin of the word 'Clane'. From the disclosures in the Annals of Mac Firbis, concerning the horrific Cath Almhaine, we see the *Cruachán Claonta* as having been known widely throughout Leinster and having a significance attributed to it which was of a supernatural order. It is interesting that all thermal springs, apart from a small few accidentally discovered during excavation, happen to be also holy wells dedicated to early saints or religious practices. There can be little doubt but that their adoption under Christianity points to the fact that there were equally important pre-Christian traditions attached to them. O'Donovan was and is the acclaimed expert on place names; however in 1860 when he was writing up his assessment he had before him a round hill fashioned by the Normans. Apart from the tail which sloped away at a very low level to the west, he would have seen little evidence of a sloping hill or cruachán claonta. For anyone who had been familiar with the sloping tail and who could see how it fitted into the context of the east and west profiles exposed by the JCB a whole new opportunity presented itself for interpretation. Also, though the well is now covered over, had he known that the Geological Survey would inevitably register it as a thermal spring, he would have seen things in a whole new light, especially if he had made

comparisons between this isolated gravel hill and other gravel hills associated with other recorded thermal springs. It is important, however damaged the evidence may be at this stage, that these few surviving facts be passed on to posterity.

### **View of Motte from the N.E. following paring away of sides by JCB.**



Note original soil profile (brown - horizontally divided into a top-soil layer and sub-soil layer), covering un-disturbed gravels beneath. Note also gravel top-filling piled above the original surface level (as indicated by the soil profile) in creating the Motte.

Note the exposed soil profile on the east side (as in photograph) was up to 7feet above ground level. On the west side it was of the order of half this height.

**View of Sunday's Well after the JCB** had removed the extended 'tail' of the sloping hill which ran westwards from the Motte beyond the surrounding ditch. The Well originally had an enclosing stone built structure and an outflow into a piped drain. This exited into an open ditch along the northern boundary of the property, and flowed into the Liffey.

**View of Sunday's Well prior to excavation.**



Note stone lined chamber



**Another view of Motte profile.**

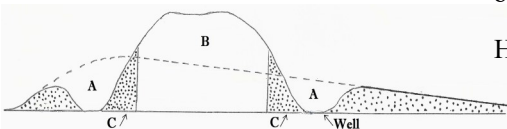


Soil profile  
 ← Norman top-fill of mixed gravel and soil.  
 ← topsoil over subsoil  
 ← Undisturbed ice-carried gravel.  
 ← Fallen debris.

**Norman Motte**

The original Norman Motte near the Liffey Bridge, Clane – seen here from the south – presumably erected by Richard de Hereford in the late 12th century. It is traditionally known as "King Mesgegra's Grave" where the legendary 1st century King of Leinster was reputedly buried.

These last three photos are from the late Hermann Geissel's web site. **Editor**



- X-X:** The Cruachán Claonta  
**A:** Excavated by Norman mote builders.  
**B:** Materials (from A) piled on top by mote builders  
**C:** Excavated by JCB (all dotted areas).

