
Reclaiming the Spoils of Annwfyn

Regia Altera and the landscape of the Mabinogi
eBook Edition

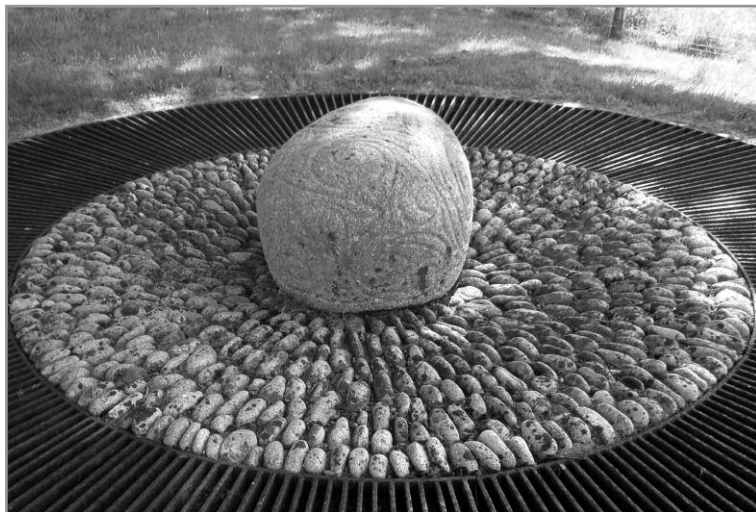
A large, smooth, grey stone ball is the central focus, resting on a bed of smaller, rounded grey stones. The stones are arranged in a circular pattern, and the entire scene is framed by a metal grate. The background shows a grassy area with a wooden post and a fence line.

by Gerard Beggan

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The Castlestrange La Tène egg-stone

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“Nothing is more glorious, more respectable, more honourable than to bring to light the knowledge of antiquity..... in order that each successive generation might possess knowledge of their ancestors.”

Micheál Ó Cléirigh, 1636
(Co-writer of the *Annals of the Four Masters*)

Foreword

Few themes in Celtic Studies have generated so much scholarly attention as the Mabinogi legends and the question of their origins. These stories, the earliest versions of which are embedded into the Welsh landscape and are to be found in manuscripts written in Middle Welsh, are rich works which have been investigated from many angles. Lady Charlotte Guest, who first published a translation to English of the complete Mabinogion between 1838 and 1845, marvelled at many of the strange names of people and places arising therein. Deeming these to be the earliest features of the tales and the least likely to change, she wondered from whence they had come – the obvious implication being that they had not come from Wales.

There clearly is an Irish influence in the composition of the four legends called *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*. That a predominant part of their subject matter is based upon ‘*borrowings*’ from Irish tales has been widely promulgated by Welsh academics, though there is no agreement as to how and when such ‘*borrowings*’ took place. One result of this lack of knowledge is that it is held by some scholars that they had been handed down from generation to generation by Welsh story-tellers.

Kuno Meyer (1858-1919), a German scholar distinguished in the field of Celtic philology and literature, founder of the School of Irish Learning in Dublin and Professor of Celtic languages at the Royal Irish Academy had proposed that these legends had been transmitted to Wales not earlier than the 9th century and they were handed over *by oral tradition*. Recent research by Professor John Carey, an American who trained in Celtic Studies at Harvard University, concluded that there was a “pervasive Irish influence on the composition of the first three branches of the Mabinogi” *through a cluster of texts* that probably came from Ireland to Wales in the ninth century. He deduced that Welsh bards drew freely on these materials, re-weaving their contents with the Welsh landscape “*in a spirit of intellectual self-assertion*”. More recent investigations by Professor Patrick Sims-Williams of Aberystwyth University concluded that there was relatively little *literary* traffic between Ireland and Wales, at least through the vernacular (sic)

languages, adding that Irish influence on medieval Welsh literature is *slight*, medieval Irish literature being more often a rich and indispensable quarry for *analogues* rather than for sources.

Contrasting with most other investigations *Reclaiming the Spoils of Annwfn – Regia Altera and the landscape of the Mabinogi* is a new approach to this enquiry. The author, using insights gained from his previous local history research in the ancient territory of *Seinchineoil* in north-east Co. Galway and including a small adjacent district in Co. Roscommon, in conjunction with information gleaned from the scholarly Mabinogi literature, identified for closer study a zone traversed by the upper River Suck. Using a multidisciplinary line of inquiry drawing on Irish (oral and written) and involving landscape study, place-name research, national and local history, local enquiry, mathematical and scientific insights and documental research, a range of new information was uncovered, leading to the discovery of the origins of the Mabinogi and their ultimate fate.

A consideration of the Mabinogi literature raised a question as to the politics of promulgated knowledge. Given that a Norman connection with at least some of the legends available to her was suspected by Lady Guest, it seems a great wonder that more attention has not already been given to the invasion of Ireland by Welsh Normans as a line of inquiry into the origins of these legends. As matters have stood until now, a dearth of incontestable landscape evidence has allowed the proliferation of partisan opinions – whether expressed through the process of dating Middle Welsh documents or in arguments about ‘analogues’, ‘borrowings’, ‘cognates’, ‘correspondences’, ‘phonetic similarities’, ‘native etymologies’, etc. Unfortunately, these latter considerations can as readily be employed as tools for political shenanigans as for the maintenance of academic objectivity.

In the case of the origins of the Mabinogi, coherent landscape information becomes of vital importance, for it is lack of concrete landscape evidence (combined perhaps with under-usage of common sense) that has allowed nimble imaginations to promulgate *Caer Sidi* as a magic island in the ocean, *Annwfn* as a Celtic *Underworld*, *Defwy* as possibly a river between this world and the next, *Caer Dathyl* as a golden fortress and *Matholwch* as possibly “a typical name for an Irishman” – to take just a few examples.

History too was of vital importance in this research, notably history as

it related narrowly to the local landscape, but viewed also in the international and ecclesiastical context. A poet's topography is related to landscape, and allusions to such landscape by composers of certain poems now recorded in Middle Welsh can be helpful indicators to a researcher. Thus, when one is informed by one poet that there was a well above Caer Sidi, then its promotion by *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* as 'a magic island in the ocean' seems risible, particularly if another poet says that 6,000 men stood upon its walls. And if a poem states that king Aeddon Mór hailed from the land of Gwydion then that is a good reason why one might try to discover his roots.

The chief findings from this study are that the remnants of the hitherto unlocated pre-historic royal seat which is called Regia Altera in Ptolemy's map of Hibernia are still extant in land anciently called *Seinchineoil* and this was the abode of Mallolwch (*alias* Matholwch) king of Ireland. The Mabinogi tales originated in the environs of this royal seat, and probably were narrated for the purpose of royal entertainment. A conclusion is that the earliest known abode of pre-historic kings of Ireland is Regia Altera, now in north-east Co. Galway.

In course of time the Mabinogi tales evidently became the property of the O'Connor kings of Connacht and Ireland, and were recorded in manuscripts which were held in Regia Altera which by that time was transformed into a medieval monastery. This abbey, called *Mainistir na Liath* in Irish, but phonetically written *Monasternalea* in English and translated as *Abbeygrey*, *Gray Abbey* and *Abbey Grey* has been totally demolished, save for its graveyard. Together with recorded poetry these legends were seized by hostile Welsh Normans in early 1177 from Abbeygrey, and probably by mid-May of that year had been transferred to Wales *in a batch*. Appropriate modification took place to facilitate their being embedded into the Welsh landscape, probably for the enhancement of medieval Wales and to boost the status of its princes.

American John Bollard, a Rochester University graduate who is recognised world-wide as an expert on the Mabinogi, wrote "*I propose not only that there is no such thing as "The Mabinogion", but that – until further notice – there may not even be a "collection" of medieval Welsh tales, at least not from a medieval perspective*". The present research results bear out that proposition. Evidently some appalling error of judgement occurred when it

was thought that the original manuscripts of the Mabinogi were scribed versions of Welsh legends handed down for generations by Welsh story-tellers.

Section One of this booklet establishes that the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* originated at the royal seat called Regia Altera in Ptolemy's map of Hibernia. Section Two establishes that the Middle Welsh poem *Preiddeu Annwn* relates to a real event, that being an attack on Abbeygrey by Welsh Normans in 1177, and the seizure therefrom of a batch of manuscripts of legends and poetry which were subsequently taken to Wales. The author attempts to offer his own understanding of that poem and asserts that, until it can be established to the contrary, not a syllable of these legends ever passed the lips of a Welsh story-teller prior to 1177, if indeed ever at all. In light of these findings it is for Celtic Studies specialists to re-asses apolitically the extent of Irish influence on Medieval Welsh literature, re-dating manuscripts if needs be.

Section Three puts the historical ambience of the ancient region of Cruffon in north-east Co. Galway into verse format, and is intended as a light-hearted tribute to those medieval gaelic poets whose works were seized at Abbeygrey and subsequently attributed to a spurious Taliesin.

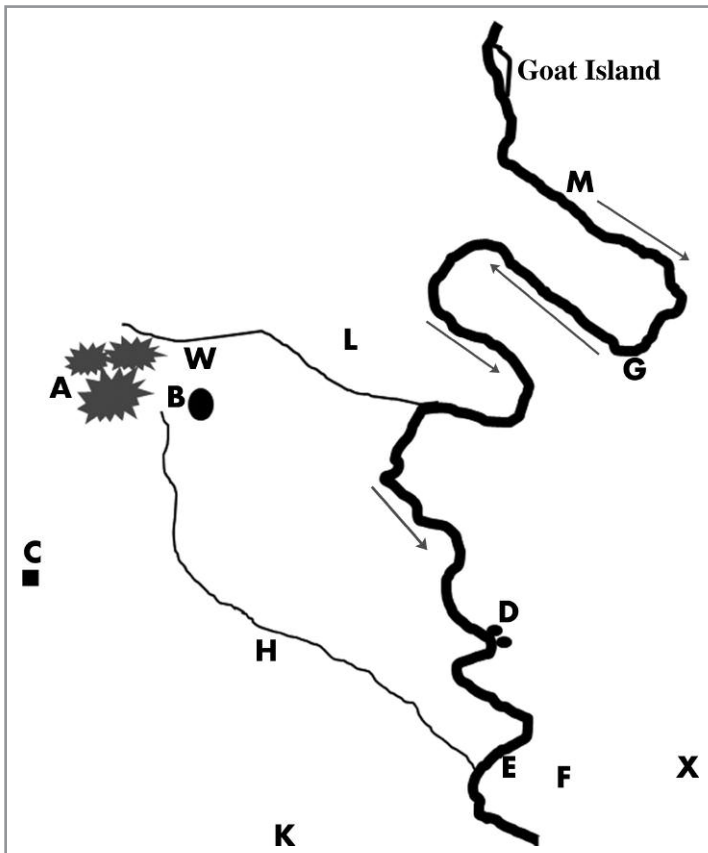
Sketch of the upper River Suck from Castlecoote bridge to Mount Talbot bridge in the Mabinogi landscape in ancient *Seinchineoil*

- A. Mount Mary; *alias* Sliaw-furri – ‘the mountain of the high (= royal seat’; *alias* the mountain of the ‘Old Tribes’.
- B. Regia Altera bounded by rivers; *Mat Sól Loc’s* (Mallolwch’s) abode, *alias* Caer Sidi, Caer Ochren, the Glass Fortress, etc., etc.; location of at least two medieval monasteries in succession.
- C. ‘Caer Dathyl’ on an artificial island, *alias* ‘the rocky place of the magician’; pre-historic raised tóchar; two extant mounds; abode of Mat son of Mathonwy; site of the Four-Peaked Fortress; isle of the strong door; holy well dedicated to St. Brendan the Navigator.
- D. Remnants of twin fortresses.
- E. The ford of Garrower (*Geárr Ór*); (M.W.: Uelen Rhyd).
- F. Pryderi’s hill-top tumulus.
- G. The ford of Athleague called *Áth Liag Maonacháin*.
- H. *Cill na Rí* tribal royal cemetery; extant barrow grave; *Acha Reathar* racing field; óenach site; original site of the *La Têne* egg-stone, i.e. Annwfn; Bran’s Wood; contains *Doire na bhFleadh* – ‘the oakwood of the banquets’; site of the ‘Battle of the Trees’; is now Aghran townland (*alias* *Achren*, Aghrane, *Ochren*, Aughrane, etc).
- K. Killeroran; historic name is *Cluain Acha Liag*; probably the original site of the Turoe *La Têne* stone; broken standing stone in situ; some land here granted to St. Kieran, founder of the monastery at Clonmacnoise (died c.549); site of the Battle of *Achadh Liag* in 775; two churches registered here in the 1306 *Church Taxation List* for the Diocese of

Sketch of the upper River Suck

Elphin; fields reportedly littered with horses' teeth, seen only when the land is under tillage; evidently site of inauguration of *Ui Maine* kings; last inauguration in 1595 using improvised wooden church called *Cill Rua Rí*.

- L. The land of goats.
- M. Present site of the *La Tène* egg-stone.
- W. The well above Caer Sidi.
- X. Extant gnomon post-hole for *Clog na Séad* or the *Clock of the Jewels*; *Mat Sól Loc's* (Mallolwch's) sun-arena; St. Patrick's 'Well' with simple shrine erected to St. Patrick; pilgrim site.



Section One

Regia Altera and the origins of the Mabinogi

Persons engaging in Celtic Studies in universities world-wide are likely to become acquainted with a set of legends called ‘The Mabinogion’. These highly praised stories,¹ described as “the jewel in the crown of early Welsh literature and a classic of European literature”² can be found in full in two Welsh manuscripts – *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch* (*The White Book of Rhydderch*), written about 1300-1325 and *Llyfr Coch Hergest* (*The Red Book of Hergest*), written in the interval 1375-1425. The first complete translation of the tales to English was made widely available when Lady Charlotte Guest published eleven tales in *The Mabinogion* in seven volumes between 1838 and 1845, followed by a three-volume set in 1849.³ Four of these tales are connected narratives, inter-connectedness being made manifest through some of the character-names and place-names occurring in two, three or all four of them, e.g. Pryderi, Pwyll, Gwawl, Annwfn. Each tale ends with the words “*and thus ends this branch of the Mabinogi*”. Hence the four tales are known as *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*. Briefly, these are *Pwyll Prince of Dyfed*, *Branwen daughter of Llyr*, *Mat son of Mathonwy* and *Manadán son of Llyr*.

The *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* abound in names of people and places which are patently Irish words written *phonetically* and, though arising in Middle Welsh text, seem to have been recorded from oral narration by a listening scribe. For historic reasons Irish people are unusually familiar with Irish place-names written phonetically in English, and with facility can ‘reconvert’ them to the native language. Two features are to be noted: 1. often two or more Irish words are fused together to form one English word, thus ‘*Béal an Átha Mhóir*’ is ‘Ballinamore’⁴ and 2. when recording phonetically, no spelling rules exist. Consequently various scribes have indulged their fancies in their methods of representing sounds. As a result a place-name is often written using a variety of spellings, e.g. Cloonlyon, Clonelion, Clonloyne, etc.

In her introduction to the *The Mabinogion* (1849 edition) Lady Guest marvelled at the strange names in these ancient legends. Knowing they were

not Welsh she wrote: “*Whence then came these internal marks, and these proper names of persons and places, the features of a story usually of earliest date and least likely to change?*”⁵ In these names, some of which also arise in medieval Welsh poems, the aforementioned two features are found. Irish words are fused and the scribe’s fancy is evident in spelling.⁶ In particular, one gets Mabinogi⁷, Annwfn, Annwyn, Annwfn, Caer Dathyl, Caer Siddi, Kaer Sidi, Ochren, Achren, etc. A further peculiarity, pointed out by Professor Ifor Williams (Bangor University), is that the Welsh letter ‘ll’ was used to denote the sound of the Irish letter ‘s’ or English ‘sh’.⁸

Because of peculiarities in the existing manuscripts Thomas M. Charles-Edwards has proposed that the *Four Branches* were written in the period 1050-1120,⁹ a date with which Sioned Davies concurs, though asserting that the material, or part of it certainly, can claim to have its roots in the distant past.¹⁰ She later wrote ‘(the stories)....evolved over centuries before reaching their final form: as such, they reflect a collaboration between oral and literary culture.’¹¹ Drawing on myth, folklore and history, the tales allegedly passed through generations of story-tellers before being written down in Middle Welsh in the fourteenth century in the form now known¹² – by which time myth became corrupted and they were greatly distorted.¹³

Celtic scholars are not of one mind regarding the origins of these Mabinogion legends which are deemed to have been stories for the entertainment of princes and kings. A main tenet of academics in Wales regarding them is that a predominant part of their subject matter is based upon borrowings from Irish tales.¹⁴ Discovering the place of their historic origins and dating their first recording in Middle Welsh are both long-standing objectives in academia.¹⁵ One of the four stories – *Branwen daughter of Llyr* – is thought¹⁶ to have pre-dated the division of Ireland into five provinces.¹⁷ As Patrick Sims-Williams has pointed out, the tale belongs to an Ireland governed by monarchs and not by provincial kings competing for the high kingship.¹⁸ In it *Mallolwch*,¹⁹ king of Ireland, sailed to Wales with thirteen ships to woo Branwen, sister of Bran, king of the Britains.²⁰ The story ends in tragedy arising from the treatment of Branwen in Ireland by Mallolwch’s people who, after a son was born, were unforgiving of an insult offered to their king while he had been in Wales to marry. Her brother Bran, on being informed of this abusive treatment, sailed over to Ireland with an enormous army. Bran pursued Mallolwch across the Shannon²¹ to

his royal abode. Although a peaceful solution was agreed, a combat arose while feasting and everyone was killed *except seven* of Bran's warriors.²² According to legend Bran's head was brought back to Wales by these survivors, and after death he became guardian of Britain.²³

Ptolemy's map of Hibernia is said to have been constructed from data held in the great Library of Alexandria.²⁴ The data in that map pre-date the division of Ireland into five provinces, making it of special relevance to the legend *Branwen daughter of Llyr*. Two competing centres of royal power are shown on the map, *Regia* in the north of the island²⁵ and *Regia Altera*²⁶ in the mid-west. A comparison of maps (Fig. 1) shows that *Regia Altera* and the little town of Ballygar in Co. Galway are, or very nearly are, the same place.²⁷ Elsewhere Ballygar has been shown to have been the royal seat of the *Uí Maine* which emerged in the 4th century in an extensive region anciently called *Seinchineoil*.²⁸ Hence, the *Uí Maine* royal seat emerged at the place of the earlier royal seat called *Regia Altera*.²⁹

An informed landscape search seeking traces of a pre-historic palace in the general environs of Ballygar identified them at an enormous circular mound on mountainous land in the angle between the Suck and Shiven rivers.³⁰ The Galway scholar, historian and Irish chieftain Rory O'Flaherty, writing in Latin in the 17th century, called this high ground 'Sliaw-furri' – the 'mountain of the high (i.e. royal) seat'. It is to be noted that when writing in a foreign language O'Flaherty resorted to phonics to convey and retain the Irish name of the mountain.³¹ This high ground in a region anciently called *Seinchineoil*³² was known also as *Sliabh seana-thuath*³³ – 'the

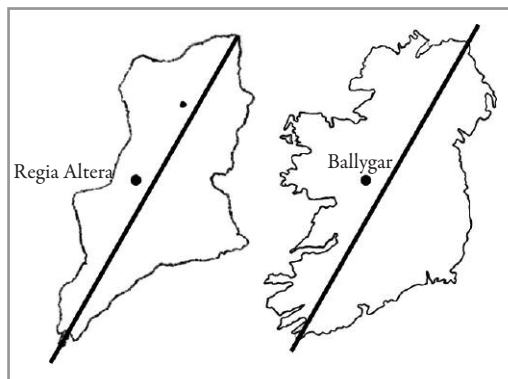


Figure 1

mountain of the Old Tribes'. Once again and equally notable, in 15th century papal letters relating to an abbey on this mountain³⁴ the use of phonics also arose.³⁵ One deduces that use of phonics was not unusual when writing Irish names in a foreign language, whether English, Latin or Middle

Welsh. It is not necessarily indicative of oral narration.

Describing this enormous circular mound, better known locally as Abbeygrey or Monasternallea,³⁶ the antiquarian Thomas Westropp wrote: “Abbey Grey, or Monasternallea, in Athleague, on the Suck, is girt by a large mound 600 feet inside, and 700 feet over all, with a fosse 25 feet wide.”³⁷ Shown distinctly on the 25-inch Ordnance Survey Ireland map (hereafter OSI) and labelled ‘Abbey Grey Fort’, its overall extent is therein given as 8.428 acres. Three access points are plainly shown on this OSI map. Ramparts inside the fosse were also 25 feet wide. Trees and bushes nowadays grow on these ramparts, making the wheel-like site easily visible from the air.³⁸ Stated to have been known locally as “The Ring”,³⁹ at least two abbeys were built here consecutively – evidently a Cistercian abbey⁴⁰ which was in ruins before c.1370 and a Carmelite monastery dating from c.1440.⁴¹ Of these, only a graveyard remains at the centre of the site. In the sketch here (Fig. 2) the positions of its three entrances are shown.

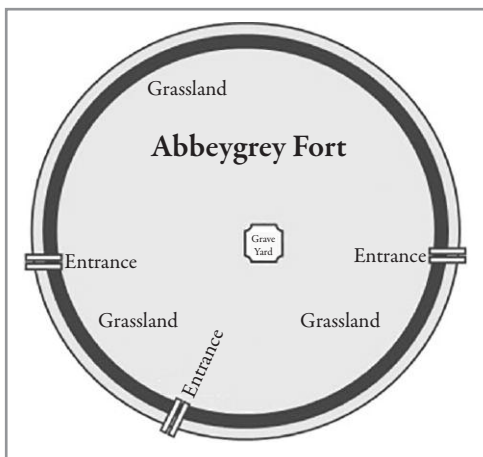


Figure 2.
Regia Altera, a wheel-like, triple ring fortress

It will be shown in Section Two of this booklet that Abbeygrey was the legendary royal residence at which Bran encountered Mallolwch in the tale *Branwen daughter of Llyr*. Hence, the present writer’s research suggests that the story of Branwen is a fiction which may have had as its basis some true historical event. Historically the name ‘Bran’ arose at the *Uí Maine* royal seat in the townland⁴² name *Ros Broin*⁴³ (Bran’s Wood), a name which was superseded in the 18th century by the name ‘Hermitage.’⁴⁴ The wood to which the name refers is deemed locally to be ancient. In 1641 the land denominations *Ros Broin* and *Cuar Ri*⁴⁵ combined were known as ‘Ballagar’⁴⁶ (sic), thus juxtaposing the name ‘Bran’ and an ancient tribal royal

residence. At first sight this reference to Bran at an ancient royal seat seems to link the legend of Branwen with Regia Altera. As it seems unsafe to make such linkage at this stage, such association will shortly be established by means other than by the name *Ros Broin*. *Ros Broin* has been translated as ‘*Bran’s Wood or Point*’.⁴⁷

The Welsh pronunciation of Mallolwch sounds like ‘match-owe-luk’ or ‘mat-show-luk’,⁴⁸ the second syllable being explosive and heavily stressed. This renders Irish *Mat Sól Loc*,⁴⁹ meaning ‘Sun-arena Mat’. Although nowhere in the legend *Branwen daughter of Llyr* is Mallolwch associated with the sun yet the present writer is not the first to make such association.⁵⁰

To have been given the name ‘Sun-arena Mat’ there must have been some particular place in the landscape which could be regarded as a sun arena. The landscape near Regia Altera does not disappoint. At a distance of about 6 miles from Regia Altera lies a curious topographical feature near a lake which is a turlough. Known for centuries as *Glún Phádraig*⁵¹ but recently renamed Cluain Patrick, it is recorded as a national monument.⁵² Long celebrated as a local holy well and pilgrimage site,⁵³ there is an enduring local belief that St. Patrick visited this place.⁵⁴

The “well” essentially is a shallow dry hole gouged in *extensive*⁵⁵ level bare slabrock which generated the name *Cluain Maoil Lige*.⁵⁶ That this hole (Fig. 3)⁵⁷ was the post-hole of a gnomon sun-clock becomes evident. A gnomon requires a stable platform, particularly because latitude can be accurately determined by using a stable gnomon. This hole in slabrock is ideal.⁵⁸ Moreover, a bespoke sun-clock site can unquestionably be regarded as a ‘sun arena’. Curiously, the whole platform here becomes flooded by a seasonal adjacent turlough⁵⁹ lake. To select an immovable floodable platform for a sun-clock would be folly unless its purpose included the study of the night sky, because a flooded gnomon platform can be used to study and measure the movements of stars reflected in water.⁶⁰



Figure 3

That some ancient feature in the landscape hereabouts was a clock of major noteworthiness⁶¹ is affirmed by the nearby land-name *Clog na Séad*,⁶² meaning ‘Clock of the Jewels.’⁶³ “Jewels”, when associated with a flooded gnomon platform and a clock, can be explained as a figurative reference to reflected stars and to astrology.⁶⁴ In Section Two *Mat Sól Loc*’s association with Regia Altera will be confirmed. The legend therefore makes it logical to connect *Mat Sól Loc* with this sun-place and, as he was the owner of a fleet of fine ships, probably with astronomy too. One therefore has two distinct places associated with this ancient legendary sun king of Ireland.

The ‘land of Annwfn’ is mentioned in the Mabinogi legends. Welsh Celtic scholars proclaim it to have been a Celtic Underworld, for somewhat spurious reasons.⁶⁵ In reality it is a much less exotic place, as shall now be explained.

In 1641 in the former Parish of Killeroran⁶⁶ the land denomination *Bealach Fhearta Tír Uibhe* was put on record.⁶⁷ Translated as ‘the road to the tumulus in the land of the egg’ the name, when examined, is a storeroom of forgotten local information. It implies firstly that somewhere in the locality there was some highly important egg-like entity.⁶⁸ Second, the land in which this egg-like entity lay was locally known as *Tír Uibhe* – ‘the land of the egg’. Third, this egg-like entity was near a tumulus (*fear*⁶⁹) – and *vice versa*. And finally, a road led to this tumulus in ‘the land of the egg’.

Lying nowadays on the avenue to a gentleman’s residence in Castlestrange townland, overlooking the river Suck and a few miles north-east of Regia Altera, there is a famous pre-historic egg-like granite stone. Ornamented in *La Tène* style, it is deemed by academics to have originally belonged to a pre-historic royal or religious site of major importance.⁷⁰ In 1902 its inscribed ornamentation was judged by George Coffey – first keeper of antiquities at the National Museum of Ireland – to be unmistakably of a “distinctly early” (sic) *La Tène* style, certainly falling within the period c.150 BC – 325 BC.⁷¹ Coffey deemed that the stone had been moved from its unknown original site.

The age, ornamentation and present location of this stone all suggest it belonged to the nearby royal seat Regia Altera.⁷² Called “The Castlestrange *La Tène* stone” this artefact is not merely popularly deemed egg-like;⁷³ the ratio of its length to its width⁷⁴ is precisely the same as that of an average pullet’s egg.⁷⁵ It therefore represents a *bird-egg*, and a royally ornamented

one at that.⁷⁶

One shall now attempt to identify the tomb near which, according to the place-name *Bealach Fhearta Tír Uibhe*, this exotic egg-stone formerly lay, bearing in mind that it is evidently to be associated with an important royal or religious site accessible by a road which gave its name to land in Killeroran Parish. In 1641, again in the former Parish of Killeroran, a land denomination was recorded as ‘Killnerea & Agherahar’.⁷⁷ This compound name means ‘*the cemetery of the kings & the racing field*’. Such a name is not merely indicative of the presence of a royal cemetery; it also is indicative of a religious site, because early gaelic kings were deemed to be god-like, alive or dead. This compound name also indicates that this place must have been an *óenach* site – a place of public assembly for public administration and for horse-racing and athletics.⁷⁸

In the woodland which was formerly known as *Ros Broin* but which nowadays is known by two unrelated names - ‘Aughrane’ and ‘Castlekelly’⁷⁹ a prehistoric barrow grave exists in a still wooded demesne field which was called ‘Timberhouse Park’ by Denis H. Kelly (d.1877) – he being an extensive landowner, noted scholar and last chieftain of the Skrine branch of the gaelic Kelly tribe of *Uí Mainne*. Lucidly marked “Barrow” in the OSI map of the Castlekelly demesne, this tomb lies in the land denomination which was recorded as ‘Killnerea & Agherahar’. Within a couple of hundred metres lie the remnants of an ancient ring-fort – one of many which were common in the wider environs of Ballygar⁸⁰ and indicative of an ancient habitation in this region.

In the land-name ‘Killnerea & Agherahar’ the component ‘Killnerea’ is a reference to an ancient tribal royal cemetery which includes this barrow grave.⁸¹ Further, there is no other royal cemetery in the region, and so this is the only ancient tomb in Killeroran Parish that would correspond to ‘*feart Tír Uibhe*’, the conclusion being that this tomb was in land known as *Tír Uibhe* – the land of the egg. In short, the ‘land of the egg’ is known, and the totality of place-name information and archaeological evidence places this ornate stone near this royal tomb, in *óenach* land not far from the royal enclosure of Regia Altera. This is in accord with an observed pattern, i.e. the custom of early gaelic kings taking up residence near an ancient tribal cemetery.

Returning to consider the local place-name *Bealach Fhearta Tír Uibhe*

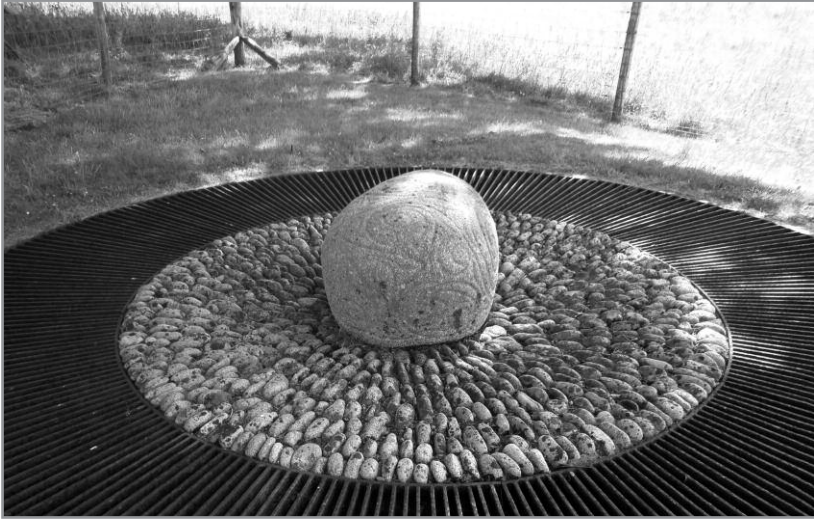


Figure 4. An Ubb Éin or Annwfyfn

as a language phrase which was used in local colloquial speech in a place where there existed an exotic uniquely ornamented egg-stone which represented a bird-egg one can conclude that there must also have been in that colloquial speech the sub-phrases *Tír Uibhe* (the land of the egg) and *Feart Tír Uibhe* (the tumulus in the land of the egg). In such circumstances it would be absolutely absurd to contend that in that local speech there never was mention of *an ubh éin* (the bird-egg) itself, which generated these phrases and which was a real visible artefact in the local landscape. *An ubh éin* can be written phonetically as one's fancy decides: *an uv ain*, *an uf n*, *annwfyfn* and even *ann ú n*.⁸² In three of the four Mabinogi legends this name arises written phonetically in Middle Welsh in various forms: *annwfyfn*,⁸³ *annwvyn*, *annwfn*, *annwn*, etc.

In two of the Mabinogi legends⁸⁴ Arawn⁸⁵ was king of 'the land of Annwfyfn'. Hence *Tír Uibhe* and 'the land of Annwfyfn' over which Arawn was king both refer to the *óenach* land surrounding the egg-like Castlestrange *La Tène* stone when it was in its original position at the *óenach* site at Killnerea & Agherahar. In the legend *Pwyll*, Arawn exchanged place and shape with Pwyll for a year.⁸⁶ The implication of the exchange was that Pwyll was put in charge of the *óenach* – the administrative seat of the kingdom, and place for public assembly called by the king and presided over by him.

One is aware that Pwyll proved himself to be an effective administrator.

Because three of the four Mabinogi legends are located in the 'land of the bird-egg' they belong to the environs of Regia Altera. As the character Pryderi⁸⁷ is a single unifying thread binding all four legends together, then *Branwen daughter of Llyr* must belong with these three and belong to Regia Altera too.

Further evidence that the Mabinogi legends originated at Regia Altera shall now be provided. This evidence centres on certain places mentioned in the legend *Mat son of Mathonwy* and on Pryderi himself. In the legend *Mat son of Mathonwy* a fortress called 'Caer Dathyl' in Middle Welsh is more frequently mentioned than any other place.⁸⁸ Caer Dathyl was the abode of a magician Mat where a beautiful maiden, Goewin,⁸⁹ much cherished by him, was his constant footholder, *except* when Mat was at war. Mat had a nephew Gilfaethwy⁹⁰ who was in love with Goewin. Because Goewin was never free of Mat, Gilfaethwy endured much frustration. Gwydion, a wizard brother of Gilfaethwy therefore devised a ruse to lure Mat from Caer Dathyl and thereby help Gilfaethwy win Goewin. His ploy was to start a war deliberately. Villainously, he decided to steal pigs from Pryderi, to whom they had been sent by Arawn, king of Annwfn. Thus it was that a pig-war commenced, drawing Mat from Caer Dathyl.

The information that the pigs were sent by "*Arawn, king of Annwfn*" connects this story to the vicinity of the 'bird-egg' and Regia Altera. It is to be established that so also does Caer Dathyl.

Caer Dathyl is Irish written phonetically. It is *Cathair*⁹¹ *Dá Tul*, meaning 'the fortress of the two mounds'. This name implies that the magician Mat resided at some fortress where there were two umbos or mounds. The exact location of two mounds associated with a magician is known.

Fig. 5 herewith shows a celebrated site lying at an *overland* distance of about 4.5km. to the south-west of Regia Altera. Nowadays known as 'St. Brendan's' in the Parish of Killian,⁹² in 1641 it was recorded as *Creagán a' Ghruagaigh*,⁹³ meaning 'the rocky place of the magician'. As the sketch here shows, it is sited on the little Cloonlion River and it is approached from the west via a long narrow pre-historic *tóchar* which must have led to a doorway. This *tóchar* is raised 6-8 feet above the level of the surrounding land. Along its whole length it is protected at each side by water which prevents access to it, at one side a wide trench and at the other the Cloonlion River. This

river has obviously been diverted to form a small island, distinctly shown on Dr. Petty's map.⁹⁴ It flows around a piece of ground, making a small, virtually impregnable artificial island fortress site (Fig. 5).⁹⁵ By 1641, having fallen to ruin, the place bore the descriptive name 'the rocky place of the magician'. It would seem that the stones have now been all removed.

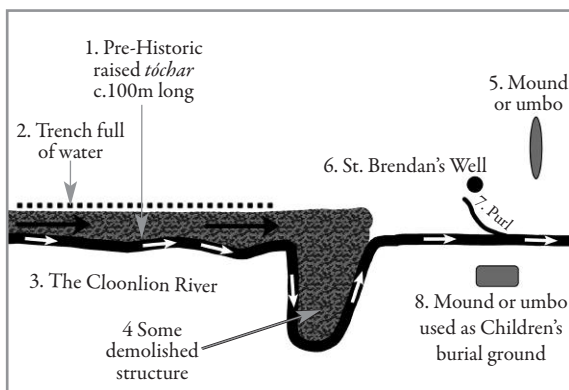


Figure 5. 'The Rocky Place of the Magician',
Caer Dathyl or Cathair Dá Tul

As the sketch shows, there are two ancient mounds or tumuli, one of which has long been used as a graveyard for unbaptised children, a crude stone marking each infant's grave. There is a holy well here dedicated to St. Brendan the Navigator who spent some time in the Roscommon-Galway-Mayo region, and of course spent many years doing mission work in Wales. A little rill or purl rises very close to the well, but does not issue from it. Because the rill is a few feet higher than the Cloonlion river it tinkles musically as it tumbles into it. Therefore, at this place one could regard either of the rivers as a 'river of song' (i.e. *abhann oidhe*, *abhann* being Irish for 'river' and pronounced 'owen' in Connacht⁹⁶). Or alternatively, as this rill issues directly from the 'Underworld' and is unpolluted, one could regard it as a 'virgin river' or a 'maiden river' (i.e. *abhann óigh*). Thus this water feature suggests two possible interpretations of 'Mathonwy' (Math/on/wy), (i) *Mat abhann oidhe* meaning 'Mat of the river of song', or (ii) (perhaps less likely) *Mat abhann óighe* meaning 'Mat of the virgin river'.⁹⁷ That this place was originally the site of a stone fort or fortress associated with a magician and accessed along a narrow raised *tóchar* is obvious from the name and the archaeological evidence, and it will later be deduced that it must have remained serviceable until as late as the 12th century. This place is Caer Dathyl to which the story *Mat son of Mathonwy* relates.⁹⁸ For convenience

it will be referred to by its Welsh name ‘Caer Dathyl’ rather than its Irish name *Creagán a’ Ghrugaigh* throughout this Section and Section Two.

The pig-war in the legend *Mat son of Mathonwy* was deliberately caused by Gwydion’s theft of Pryderi’s pigs. Mat took counsel with his war-band “*about on which flank they should wait for Pryderi....*”. They decided to wait between two fortresses until Pryderi and his ‘men of the south’ came to do battle against them. The exact site of these twin fortresses will shortly be identified.

Following Pryderi’s arrival the conflict started. The legend states that he and his war-band were forced **to retreat** as far as *Nant Call*, at which place there was “*an immeasurable conflict*”. Though peace was made there, and hostages taken, trouble re-rose between the *returning warriors* as they came up to *Uelen Rhyd*, because the footmen in both war-bands re-commenced firing missiles at each other. To prevent further deaths Pryderi asked that the fighting stop and that it be left to himself and Gwydion⁹⁹ to fight a duel. In this encounter Pryderi was killed. According to the words of the legend Pryderi was buried ‘*above Uelen Rhyd, and there his grave is [still (sic)]*’.¹⁰⁰

As Pryderi’s men are described in the legend as “men of the south”, whether that be Munster or south Leinster their route to ‘Caer Dathyl’ and/or Regia Altera would have required them to cross the Shannon. Giraldus Cambrensis’ account of the Shannon shows that it was a major defence against any warband setting out for north-east Co. Galway.

Having crossed the Shannon at any ford upriver¹⁰¹ from where the River Suck joins it below the present town of Shannon Bridge, they would still be separated from both ‘Caer Dathyl’ and Regia Altera by the Suck itself (Figure 6). When fortified with local landscape knowledge, common sense dictates that the words ‘*on which flank they should wait for Pryderi*’ were a reference to a *bank* of the River Suck. The legend also makes obvious that

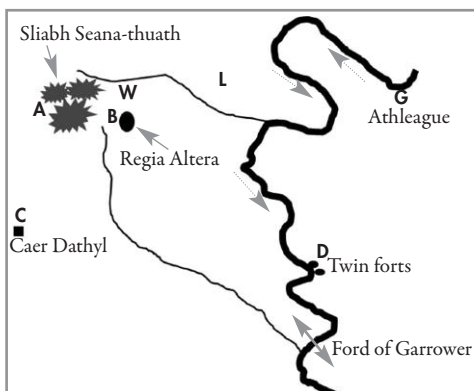


Figure 6. The River Suck from the bridge at Castlecoote to the bridge at Mount talbot

this was a river which had to be crossed on the homeward route of some of the pugilists.

Being wide, slow and deep with very few natural fords, the River Suck is a formidable barrier to any incursion deep into Connacht. Even in late medieval times there were *only two fords* which allowed *winter passage* across it.¹⁰² One of these was at Athleague (Ir.: *Áth Liag*) which, although nearer to Roscommon town, would not be on the medieval route from that town to Tuam town. This ford at Athleague on the Suck is known in Irish as *Áth Liag Maonacháin*, that name distinguishing it from a more notable ford over the Shannon at Lanesboro which is called *Áth Liag Fhinn*, the latter giving entry to Connacht from the east and south.

The second ford which allowed winter passage across the Suck was downriver from Athleague, nearer to both Regia Altera and ‘Caer Dathyl’. On the medieval route from Roscommon to Tuam, this has been recorded as the ford of Garoure¹⁰³, *alias* Garrower,¹⁰⁴ Garrowar,¹⁰⁵ Garrowra and Garroe¹⁰⁶. These are anglicised name-forms relating to the same ford, and they derive from three names in Irish – *Geárr Órdha* (Garrowra), *Geárr Ór* (Garrower) and *Geárr Ró* (Garroe) which mean respectively ‘the golden/splendid/excellent weir’, ‘the golden weir’ and ‘the weir of plenty’. Thus, ‘the ford of Garrower’ was at a weir for catching fish and known as ‘the ford of the golden weir’. This ancient weir was evidently deemed ‘golden’ because of its abundant yield. Curiously, when the legend was adapted and embedded in the medieval Welsh countryside the Middle Welsh version of the tale retained the ‘golden’ concept in the ford name *uelen rhyd*, these words meaning ‘the golden ford’.¹⁰⁷ From documentary evidence,¹⁰⁸ O.S.I. maps¹⁰⁹ and landscape knowledge one knows that the ford at Garrower was a short distance upriver from the present bridge at Mount Talbot, where a river holm caused the river to flow in two channels, one of them now silted up.¹¹⁰

In pre-historic times two fortresses were constructed very close to each other (Figure 6) on the east bank of the River Suck, near the ford of Garrower. These twin fortresses generated the appellation ‘Cloondarah’ for the townland in which their remnants still exist.¹¹¹ ‘Cloondarah’ is *Cluain Dá Ráth* – the ‘*cloon*¹¹² of the two forts.’ These forts are the obvious ‘landscape correspondents’ to the “*two fortresses*” where Mat awaited Pryderi’s warband.¹¹³ Therefore, in keeping with the legend-phrase “*above uelen rhyd*”,¹¹⁴ a prehistoric grave ought exist in some location that is near to, but *above*,

the ford of Garrower (*alias* uelen rhyd).

On Dr. Petty's map of Co. Roscommon the Suck-side place-names 'Tallar' and 'Tallardkeil' are shown in close proximity to the ford of Garrower. In Irish these are *Tol Árd* – 'the lofty tumulus,' and *Tol Árd Coille*¹¹⁵ – 'the lofty tumulus in woodland.'¹¹⁶



Figure 7. *Pryderi's tumulus or 'The dumb-house of leisure'*

Both names signify the existence of a lofty nearby umbo tomb. Fulfilling expectations fuelled by these old place-names, atop Mount Talbot hill, overlooking the ford of Garrower and at a distance of about 300 metres from the River Suck a prehistoric tumulus lies at a place which, up to 1841, was thickly wooded.¹¹⁷ Nowadays overshadowed by a couple of trees (Figure 7),¹¹⁸ this tumulus is patently Pryderi's grave.¹¹⁹ Not only do landscape, legend and literature accord, but given that Pryderi arises in all four branches of the Mabinogi, the existence of this tumulus at this place attests to the Mabinogi origins being in the environs of Regia Altera.¹²⁰ The place-name *Ros Broin* (Bran's Wood) has not been used to establish this result.

A very brief outline of the political history of the region surrounding Regia Altera now follows. Although the gaelic kingdom of *Uí Maine* emerged at or near Regia Altera in the fourth century AD in a small region in the angle formed by the Suck and Shiven rivers, and was thereafter extended, by the year c.600 AD these people had been pushed south by the expanding *Uí Briúin Aí*¹²¹ and were restrained by them between Ahascragh and the Slieve Aughty mountains.¹²² The *Stol Muireadaigh* became the dominant *Uí Briúin* tribe and from these the O'Connor kings of Connacht later emerged. In this way the O'Connor kings of Connacht became chiefs of 'the land of the bird-egg'. Not until the O'Connor dynasty became sufficiently weakened by the Normans c.1340 did the *Uí Maine*, led by William Buí O'Kelly, succeed in regaining their ancestral lands north of the Shiven River. The Mabinogi legends, originating at the royal seat Regia Altera, evidently became the legends of the royal court of the O'Connor kings of Connacht. Their subsequent fate is dealt with in Section Two.

Section One - Notes & References

- ¹ “The Mabinogi tales provide the basis for much European and world literature – the fantasy fiction genre, so popular today, was practically unknown before its publication” – quoted from Tolstoy, N. (2009), *The Oldest British Prose Literature – the compilation of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, Edwin Mellon Press.
- ² See ‘The Mabinogi’, The Legend and Landscape of Wales series, online at <https://sites.google.com/site/themabinogi/home> accessed on 18.2.2018.
- ³ Guest, Charlotte, *The Mabinogion from the Llyfr Coch o Hergest, and other ancient Welsh manuscripts, with an English translation and Notes*, (London 1849), online at https://archive.org/details/mabiogionfromll00unse_1
- ⁴ There being not a one-to-one word correspondence, the result can have no cognate in Welsh.
- ⁵ The *Guest Journal* for March 8 1843 indicates that in preparing *The Mabinogion* Lady Guest did associate some available Middle Welsh stories with the Normans. Yet she did not look to Welsh Normans in Ireland as the possible bearers of these legends to Wales. It seems quite astonishing that this line of inquiry has not been taken up by Welsh academics long ago. See ‘John Bollard’ online at <https://mabinogistudy.com/library/john-k-bollard/> accessed on 2.7.2018.
- ⁶ Examples: A/rawn = *Aedh rân* (Noble/Generous Aedh); Arianrhod = *Oir-rioghan rod* (Spirited Fair Super-Lady); Pry/deri = *Primb-Deiridh* (‘first from the ‘butt’ or first-born); Rhiann/on = *Rioghán an* (Elegant Fair Maiden); Caer Da/thyl = *Cathair Dá Tul* (‘the fortress of the two mounds’); Gwawl = *Gabháil* (meaning ‘the full of one’s outstretched arms’. Gwawl was a rich man!); Clud = *Clúid* (‘rags’; Clud was a poor man!); Creu/wyr/yon = *Crú fhuair-dhín* (‘The chilly-roofed sty’ - i.e. built hurriedly and probably roofless); Maen Ty/uy nawc = *Maon-tigh uanach* (‘The Dumb-house of Leisure’. This was Pryderi’s tumulus), Glewlwyd = *gleo liúghaidh* (‘shouting noise’ - the high-sounding speech of the porter in *Culhwch and Olwen*); Dylan Eil Ton = *Dileann Aill Tonn* (‘Deluge of Wave-cliffs’ – son of Arianrhod and Gwydion, he could swim like a fish and no wave ever broke beneath him); etc.
- ⁷ Ir.: *maoith binn óige* - ‘(of) the sweet-sounding anguishes/woes of youth’. In the stories youth, love and tragedy are prominent themes. The name makes clear that the legends were intended for narration to hearers.
- ⁸ Ifor Williams, M.A. (1930), *Pedeir Keinc Y Mabinogi Allan O Lyfr Gwyn Rhyddersch*, Notes 195-196, online at (https://archive.org/stream/pedeirkeincymabi00will/pereirkeincymabi00will_djvu.txt). Examples: Ir. *Stonann* became ‘Llinon’; *Seabhach* became ‘Lleawch’; *Áirse Chóid* became ‘Arlle/chwedd’ (the *highest* township – a pun on *Áirc a’ Chóid* which rested on Mount Ararat. Nikolai Tolstoy has remarked that palatal ‘s’ seemingly represented difficulty for Welsh speakers. Joseph Loth also has commented: ‘Il est remarquable ...que des enfants, en Galles, jusqu’à l’âge de 2 à 3 ans, prononcent s au lieu de ll. See (i) Nikolai Tolstoy, *The Oldest British Prose Literature – the compilation of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, (New York 2009), 144 and (ii) Joseph Loth, *Les Mabinogion*, (Paris 1913), 138.
- ⁹ T. M. Charles-Edwards, ‘The Date of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi’, *Transactions*

- of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion (1970 /2, 1971), 263-298.
- ¹⁰ Sioned Davies, *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, (Llandysul, 1993), 9.
- ¹¹ Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, (Oxford, 2007), ix.
- ¹² For a discussion of dates see Patrick Sims-Williams, 'The Submission of Irish Kings in Fact and Fiction', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 22, 31.
- ¹³ The earliest complete manuscript of *Branwen ferch Llŷr* is dated to the fourteenth century but the tale is deemed to be much older. The language is Middle Welsh. What they were like before taking their present form is beyond conjecture.
- ¹⁴ Bromwich, *Branwen daughter of Llŷr: a study of the Irish affinities*, *Medium Aevum XXVIII*, 3, p. 203.
- ¹⁵ Consider W. J. Gruffydd, *Rhiannon: An Inquiry into the Origins of the First and Third Branches of the Mabinogi*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1953).
- ¹⁶ Sims-Williams, Patrick, 'The Submission of Irish Kings in Fact and Fiction', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 22, 1991, 34-35.
- ¹⁷ This is said to have been done at the time of the Domnonion invasion. Tomás O'Rahilly selected c.300 BC as the date of this *Domnonii* migration – a date for him necessarily later than the date of Pytheas' voyage which, he thought, provided the data for Ptolemy's map. However, he acknowledged that this date was based on the "mere guesswork" which some of their learned men attempted to assign to it, and he moderated that guesswork by adding that their arrival "seems actually to have occurred in the third century BC" (i.e. between 200 BC and 300 BC). Using Professor Powell's implicit correction of O'Rahilly's dating of the Dumnonian invasion, this was unlikely to have happened before 175 BC, and perhaps much later. See Powell, T.G.E.: 'The Celtic Settlement in Ireland', in Cyril Fox and Bruce Dickens (eds.), *The Early Cultures of North-West Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 1950, 173-196. See Tomás O'Rahilly: *Early Irish History and Mythology*, Section VI, 'The Lagenian Invasion', folio 116, online at: (<http://compsoc.nuigalway.ie/~dubhthach/clanmaclochlainn.com/orahilly.htm>).
- ¹⁸ Patrick Sims-Williams, 'The Submission of Irish Kings ...', 35.
- ¹⁹ *Mallolwch* is the name-form which occurs in *Peniarth 6*, the oldest surviving fragment of the tale. An alternative *Matholwch* has become standardised. See Sioned Davies, 'Matholwch' in John T. Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, (Oxford c2006), 1278. Also Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Cú Chulainn in Wales: Welsh sources for Irish onomastics', *Celtica* 21, 621.
- ²⁰ John Koch has contended that the story of Bran is an old Celtic story which is a reminiscence of the sack of Delphi in 279 BC, led by the Gaulish warlords Brennos and Bolgios. John T. Koch, 'Brân fab Llŷr/Bendigeidfran', in John T. Koch (General Editor), *The Celts, History, Life, and Culture*, Vol. 1. (California 2012).
- ²¹ The MS text gives *Llinon* as the river name. Arising from the issue initiated by W.J. Gruffydd (1953) – who proposed that the river 'Llinon' in the tale 'Branwen ferch Llŷr' was the Liffey and not the Shannon as had previously been presumed by scholars – Rachel Bromwich (Cambridge University), in her review of Proinsias Mac Cana's *Branwen daughter of Llŷr* in *Medium Aevum III* in 1959 asserted that it was "surely more natural to see in the river-name Llinon, over which Bran's army crossed on the clwyden ('burdles'), a reference to the river Liffey; O.I. Life, gen. Lifi". [When a young researcher in Queen's

University Belfast Rachel Bromwich allegedly took some lessons in Irish.] She added somewhat oddly “*the Liffey and not the Shannon is clearly the river intended in the text by the name Llinon (= Lliuon, O.Ir. Life)*”. The issue was very important because if it were the Liffey then the whereabouts of Mallolwch’s abode would be much less definite, but if it were the Shannon then Mallolwch’s abode was in Connacht, and should be easier to locate. Patrick Sims-Williams (CMCS 22) seemingly fuelling the arguments of both of these scholars against Mac Cana [and others of like mind, e.g. Ivor B. John (1897), Charles Squire (1905), Joseph Loth (1913), Sir Ifor Williams (1930), Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (1948), Jeffrey Gantz (1985), and Count Tolstoy (2009)], concluded that Liffey was far more likely, and suggested that scribal mis-copying of ‘*Lliuon*’ as ‘*Llinon*’ may have taken place. Count Tolstoy argued that the Liffey could not possibly be a barrier to put between Mallolwch and Bran and adverted to Giraldus Cambrensis’ account²² of the Shannon which showed that it was a major defence against any warband setting out for Connacht. In Tolstoy’s opinion Bran entered Ireland by the Shannon. He could be correct because after Bran’s fleet was first seen from Ireland on the ocean Mallolwch had time to muster men from throughout Ireland. Andrew Breeze (University of Navarre) also weighed into this controversy, revealing his (incomplete) understanding of Dublin Bay before accusing the ‘obstinate’ Mac Cana of “confused scholarship”. Arguably this was a contrived distraction, shifting the focus off the west of Ireland as the place in which the origins of the Mabinogi ought be sought and found. It ought have been suspected from Ptolemy’s map of Hibernia that Regia Altera was west of the Shannon, and was possibly the seat of a king of Ireland predating the division of Ireland into five provinces. Andrew Breeze, ‘Moor, Court and River’, in Albrecht Classen (ed.), *Rural Space in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, (Berlin 2012), 305-307.

²² Sioned Davies and some others have deemed Matholwch to be a weak individual, easily influenced and a puppet in the hands of his people. Yet he exhibits good breeding in (i) displaying sensitivity by not disembarking unless his proposal to marry Branwen was accepted; (ii) showing a willingness to forgive an insult while in Wales to seek the hand of Branwen; (iii) showing ability to discourse well and (iv) the splendour of his 13 ships on arrival to ask for the hand of Branwen – described as being in condition so perfect as never before seen, with banners bold, seemly and beautiful – spoke well for his sense of taste and decorum; he was probably a leading astronomer and a good mathematician. Though accused of weakness for not resisting the insistence of his people for revenge, a pre-Christian king of Ireland was not an all-powerful person whose word was law. An early Gaelic king and his people were one. Were Mallolwch heedless of their wishes his mutilated skeleton would possibly be dug up millennia later in a Galway bog. Sioned Davies, *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, 70.

²³ In memory of Bran ravens are kept at London Tower. In Irish ‘*bran*’ means ‘raven’.

²⁴ Ptolemy lived circa 140 AD. The data in his map of Hibernia are deemed to date from c.200 BC.

²⁵ Archaeological remnants at Clogher, Co. Tyrone are promoted by some as those of Regia.

²⁶ For a brief discussion of *Regia Altera* and royal towns see Patrizia de Bernardo Stempel, ‘Ptolemy’s Celtic Italy and Ireland: a linguistic analysis’ in David N. Parsons and Patrick Sims-Williams (eds.), *Ptolemy: towards a linguistic atlas of the earliest Celtic place-names*

- of *Europe* (Aberystwyth: CMCS Publications, 2000), 83-112, 98.
- ²⁷ Note that the longest line which can be drawn on a map of Ireland must correspond to the longest line which can be drawn on Ptolemy's map of Hibernia. When these lines have the same scale and are brought into parallel then Hibernia is correctly oriented. A perpendicular through Ballygar to this line cuts it in the same ratio as a perpendicular through Regia Altera to the corresponding longest line. Using scaled-up maps the identification of Regia Altera and Ballygar becomes more obvious. Note that (i) the end result justifies the means used and (ii) Ptolemy was a renowned mathematician, but had scant knowledge of the west coast of Hibernia, probably because the Atlantic was too wild for exploration by sailors of that era.
- ²⁸ G. Beggan, 'Ballygar – the Hy Many royal seat', *Co. Roscommon Historical and Archaeological Society Journal*, 30th Anniversary edition, 2016, pp. 121-126.
- ²⁹ The *Ui Maine* are deemed by some scholars to be descended from the *Érainn*. See Carl Waldman and Katherine Mason, *Encyclopaedia of European Peoples*, 2006, p. 423.
- ³⁰ Recorded as 'the Slef', 'the Slue' and 'the Slewe', meaning 'the mountain'. 'Slewe' is an approximate of 'sliau' which is *sliabh* in Connacht speech.
- ³¹ O'Flaherty, Roderic, *Ogygia, seu, Rerum Hibernicum chronologia.....* (London, 1685), pt. 3, p.175, (l. 12). O'Flaherty wrote the *Ogygia* in Latin. The mountain name is *Sliabh Fhoraidh*, written phonetically in Latin as *Sliaw-furri*. From this example one sees how this 17th century Galway historian phonetically captured the Connacht slurring or silencing of 'bh' in 'sliabh'. In Connacht speech 'mb', 'bb', and 'ph' are sometimes similarly silenced or given a 'w' sound, with implications for certain names in the Mabinogi, e.g. Pryderi (*Primb-Deiridh*), Goewin (Go-e-win; *Guth Aoibhinn*), Olwen (Ol/wen: *Uaill-bbean*).
- ³² The name means 'Old Brethren' or 'Old Kindred' and is a reference to the pre-goidelic tribes which inhabited this territory and who gave early kings to Connacht, anciently called Olnegmacht.
- ³³ For sources and variations of this name see Gerard Beggan, 'The Carmelite House of Holy Cross, Slewshancogh, Diocese of Elphin', *Co. Roscommon Historical and Archaeological Society Journal*, Vol 13, 2016, pp. 111-115.
- ³⁴ This is high ground, about 550 ft. above sea level. Such high ground is often called 'mountain' in rural Ireland.
- ³⁵ In one of the papal letters the mountain is called *Montescanhuach*. Latin *monte* means 'at (or on) the mountain'. 'Scan' is Irish *sean* where Latin 'sc' is used for Eng. 'sh' or Irish 's'; 'chuach' is the Latin phonetic close approximate of Irish *thuath*. Gerard Beggan, 'The Carmelite House of Holy Cross, Slewshancogh, Diocese of Elphin', *Co. Roscommon Historical and Archaeological Society Journal*, Vol 13, 2016, pp. 111-115.
- ³⁶ Ir.: *Mainistir na Liath* meaning 'the abbey of the Greys', seemingly a reference to Cistercians who first came to Ireland in 1142.
- ³⁷ Westropp, Thomas Johnson, 'Archaeology of the Burren: Prehistoric Forts and Dolmens in North Clare, Part V', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, Sixth Series*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1914, at www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/archaeology/arch-burren/part5_corofin_district_glencolumbcille.htm accessed on 3.1.2017.
- ³⁸ Viewable near Aughrim Bog on Google maps by requesting *Monasternalea* and selecting

- the satellite view.
- ³⁹ Francis J. Beirne (ed.), *The Diocese of Elphin – People, Places and Pilgrimage*, Columba Press. (Dublin, 2000).
- ⁴⁰ Little is known of the origins and original benefactors of many medieval monasteries in Connacht. Various clues suggest Abbeygrey was Cistercian, though it may initially have been a gaelic monastery. The specific Religious Order is unimportant to the research findings.
- ⁴¹ Beggan, ‘The Carmelite House of Holy Cross, Slewshancogh...’
- ⁴² A townland is the oldest and smallest civic division of land in Ireland. Acreage varies, but townland areas in the range 250-350 acres are fairly typical.
- ⁴³ Alias ‘Rosbrin’ in Registry of Deeds, Memorial 61693, Book 88, p. 86, Year 1737; ‘Rosbryn’ in Registry of Deeds, Book 888, Memorial 587632, p. 132, Year 1832; ‘*Ros Broin*’ in O’Donovan’s *O. S. Name-Books*, Year c.1838; ‘Rosbrien’ in *Book of Survey and Distribution*, Killeroran Parish, p. 261.
- ⁴⁴ The name *Hermitage* was first put on written record not later than 1707, and is found in Memorial 7031, Book 15, p. 183, Registry of Deeds, Dublin. Hermitage townland incorporates a wooded section of the former Castlekelly demesne which was very ancient woodland corresponding to the name *Ros Broin*.
- ⁴⁵ *Cuar rí*: ‘the circle of the kings’ or ‘royal enclosure’. In Dr. Petty’s map the land is phonetically labelled ‘Coorey’.
- ⁴⁶ Simington, Robert C., *Books of Survey and Distribution: being abstracts of various surveys and instruments of title, 1636-1703:Vol.3, County of Galway*, (Dublin, 1962), (Parish of Killeroran).
- ⁴⁷ O’Donovan, John, *O.S. Name-Books*, (Parish of Killeroran, Co. Galway).
- ⁴⁸ Consider e.g. the audio pronunciation of ‘Mallolwch’ by Welshman Stephan (online at www.forvo.com/word/mallolwch/ accessed 1.3.2015).
- ⁴⁹ Ir: *sól*: ‘sun’; Ir: *loc*: ‘place’, ‘arena’ (Latin: **locus**). For *loc* see *log* in P. S. Dinneen, *An Irish-English Dictionary*. Both Irish words indecl. Rachel Bromwich has suggested that Matholwch (an alternative to Mallolwch), was ‘a typical name for an Irishman’. Bromwich, Rachel, ‘Notes to Personal Names’, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain*, 1961.
- ⁵⁰ Although nowhere in the story of *Branwen daughter of Llyr* is Mallolwch called a ‘sun king’, yet in the following sources he is called either the ‘sun-god king of Ireland’ or the ‘sun king of Ireland’: (i) under ‘Llyr’ in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. VI, 15th edition; (ii) in *Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*, 2008, 1127 online at (<https://books.google.ie/books?isbn=1593394926>), accessed 23.4.2015; (iii) in *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, Vol 17-18, 1968, 151. snippet view online at (<https://books.google.ie/books?id=hwITAQAAMAAJ>) accessed 24.4.2015. (iv) online at (universalium.academic.ru/142753/Llyr) accessed 4.5.2015; (v) online at (www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/345252/Llyr) accessed 6.7.2015. (vi) online at (www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/77814/Branwen) accessed on 1.8.2015; (vii) online at (www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/142475/Creidylad) accessed on 1.8.2015; (viii) online at (www.britannica.com/topic/Llyr) accessed 1.8.2015.
- ⁵¹ Previously the name was *Glún Phádraig* and referred to a stone at this place which

allegedly bore the imprint of St. Patrick's knee. See *O'Donovan's Letters*, Roscommon Book, p. 12. Also see footnote 173, *The Tribes and Customs of Hy-Many commonly called O'Kelly's country*; CELT (Corpus of Electronic Texts): the online resource for Irish history, literature and politics. O'Donovan has pointed out that *Glún Phádraig* is mentioned in the medieval *Book of Lecan* as a boundary point of a region which paid stipends to St. Kerrill.

⁵² Gibbons, Alcock et alia, (compilers), *Sites and Monuments Record, Co. Roscommon*. Site 013, subsite 01302. Archaeological Survey of Ireland, Office of Public Works, 1992.

⁵³ Moran, James M., 'Cluain Patrick Pilgrimage Site', in *Vignettes, Bicentennial Commemoration Publication on Fr. James Curley S.J., 1796-1889*, Moran/Cartur Publications, 1996.

⁵⁴ A welcoming Information Board at the site claims that pilgrims have visited the place for hundreds of years. Note that St. Patrick allegedly railed against sun-worship which was widespread in Ireland in his era.

⁵⁵ Connolly, Anne, 'Archaeological Report on St. Patrick's Holy Well at Kilmore Townland, Athleague, Co. Roscommon'. 1996, (Unpublished).

⁵⁶ *Cluain Maoil Lige*: 'The 'cloon' of the bare slabrock'. Written 'Clonmelega' in Simington, Robert C., *Books of Survey and Distribution: being abstracts of various surveys and instruments of title, 1636-1703:Vol.3, County of Roscommon*, Parish of Tisrara.

⁵⁷ In very recent times the mouth or lip of the hole, evidently greatly chipped, has been 'repaired' using a cement-like mix.

⁵⁸ In 1927 this slabrock was covered by bog-soil by the people of Athleague Parish, leaving only the hole uncovered.

⁵⁹ A low-lying area on limestone which becomes flooded in wet weather through the welling up of groundwater from the rock.

⁶⁰ See e.g. '29 Zheng He's method of calculating latitude and longitude', online at (<http://www.gavinmenzies.net/Evidence/29-zheng-he%E2%80%99s-method-of-calculating-latitude-and-longitude/>) accessed on 11.01.2017.

⁶¹ Unless it had been of weighty significance it would not have generated a placename.

⁶² Ir: *Séad*: a gem or jewel.

⁶³ 'Clognesead' in Simington, Robert C., *Books of Survey and Distribution: being abstracts of various surveys and instruments of title, 1636-1703: County of Roscommon*, Parish of Tisrara. The name now is usually written 'Cloghnashade'.

⁶⁴ In antiquity the star-clock was the most reliable clock

⁶⁵ An Internet source explains: "The appearance of a form 'antumnos' (sic) on an ancient Gaulish (sic) curse tablet...suggests (sic) that the original term may (sic) have been 'ande-dubnos'(sic), a common Gallo-Brittonic word that literally meant 'underworld'". From this circumstance it is bizarrely suggested that the etymology of 'Annwfn' is 'ande-dubnos'. Logically, if 'Annwfn' be **spuriously defined** to be 'Ande-dubnos', thence, by definition, it means 'Underworld' too – or indeed anything else which it is defined to be. See 'Annwn/Annwfn' in John Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, (Oxford c2006), p.75.

⁶⁶ Now Ballygar Parish.

⁶⁷ The Irish name is recorded phonetically as 'Bellagartaterriffe'. Simington, Robert C.,

Books of Survey and Distribution: being abstracts of various surveys and instruments of title, 1636-1703: Co. Galway III, p. 262.

- ⁶⁸ Unless it had been particularly noteworthy it would not have generated a place-name.
- ⁶⁹ In this region the Irish words *feart*, *tul*, and *tulach* were used to denote a mound or barrow grave.
- ⁷⁰ Gleaned from conversation with Prof. John Waddell, Dept. of Archaeology, N.U.I.G.
- ⁷¹ Coffey, George, 'Some Monuments of the La Tène Period recently discovered in Ireland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 24C, (1902-04), pp. 258-263.
- ⁷² The Turoe stone, also moved from its original site, bears the same *La Tène* style of ornamentation as the Castlestrange stone, is made from the same *type* of granite, belongs to the *same era* and hence to the same royal seat, but being a standing stone it served a different function and its original position evidently was in *Cluain Acha Liag*, now called 'Killeroran' – an inauguration site where a broken standing stone still exists. Found at/near the Earl of Clanricarde's Galboley Castle adjacent to Turoe townland, he (Clanricarde, *alias* Earl of St. Albans) had occupied Killeroran in the 1640s, and had participated in the suppression of the Irish rebellion of 1641. Apparently the royal site was dismantled after the Battle of Kinsale in 1601 which brought an end to Gaelic Ireland.
- ⁷³ To see photos of this stone Google the words: *Castlestrange egg-stone*
- ⁷⁴ The dimensions are given by Coffey. Coffey, George, 'Some Monuments of the La Tène Period recently discovered in Ireland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 1902-04.
- ⁷⁵ Abanikanda, O.T.F., Olutogun, A.O. and Ajayi, L.A., 'Statistical Modeling of Egg Weight and Egg Dimensions in Commercial Layers', *International Journal of Poultry Science* 6(1), 2007 accessible at scialert.net/abstract/?doi=ijps.2007.59.63 accessed on 18.08.2015. Being 24 inches high with ornamentation *incised*, the stone makes a comfortable high seat or *forradh*, ornamented for a king.
- ⁷⁶ The egg-stone represents the female species in Nature. This stone's famous companion, the *La Tène* Turoe stone, represents the male species. Both are decorated with plant-like ornamentation, presumably symbolising Nature-worship.
- ⁷⁷ *Cill na Rí* and *Achadh Reathar* written phonetically in English. Killnerea is shown on *Dr. Petty's* map and the *Book of Survey and Distribution* confirms that it was partly overlapped by Tullyroe (Irish: *Tulach rua* – 'the red mound'). One therefore knows what land was called 'Killnerea & Agherahar'.
- ⁷⁸ The *óenach* was called by the tribal king. Such sites were typically located beside an ancient tribal cemetery. Horse-racing and other sports took place as entertainment for the assembled tribes-people – a legacy from ancient funeral games. See (i) The oenach project online at <https://theoenachproject.wordpress.com> accessed on 1.7.2018; (ii) Gerard Beggan, 'Ballygar – the Hy Many royal seat', Katherine Simms (ed.) *Gaelic Ireland (c.600-c.1700): politics, culture and landscapes – studies for the 'Irish Chiefs' Prize*, Wordwell, 2013, p. 89.
- ⁷⁹ The names 'Castlekelly' and 'Castle Kelly' date from the mid 18th century.
- ⁸⁰ Unfortunately some have been demolished in living memory.
- ⁸¹ An entity which originally gave a townland its name may not necessarily now be in that townland but, with very few exceptions, would rarely be far from it.
- ⁸² In some Irish-speaking localities '*ubb*' (an egg) is pronounced '*u*' (English: 'uh'), the '*bb*'

being mute.

- ⁸³ The Welsh letter ‘w’ has a ‘u’ sound which can be short or long.
- ⁸⁴ *Pwyll* and *Mat son of ‘Mathonwy’*.
- ⁸⁵ A/rawn: *Aedh rân* = noble/illustrious/generous *Aedh*. In 236 AD, 558 AD and 591 AD. kings of Connacht had the name *Aedh*.
- ⁸⁶ Irish *Poill* – meaning ‘Hollows’/‘Holes’ – socially a sharp contrast to ‘Noble *Aedh*’.
- ⁸⁷ ~~Prinh~~ *Deiridh*: ‘first of the ‘butt’; he was the first-born of *Pwyll* and *Rhiannon*. Note the slurring/silencing of ‘*mh*’ in Connacht Irish.
- ⁸⁸ *Gymraeg*, *Fersiwn*, ‘The *Mabinogi* – Places mentioned in the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogi*’, on line at (www.nantlle.com/mabinogi-saesneg-places-mentioned-in-the-fourth-branch.htm). Note that no such place can be identified in Wales, though a number of sites have been suggested.
- ⁸⁹ *Guth Aoibhinn*: ‘Delightful Voice’.
- ⁹⁰ *Gil’ Fead Oidhe* – ‘the endearing musical whistle-sound’. The storyteller evidently set up the love relationship between two human sounds, one typical of a female and one typical of a male.
- ⁹¹ *Cathair*: a stone fort.
- ⁹² Pronounced ‘kill-eye-an’. Irish: *Cill Liatháin*.
- ⁹³ ‘*Cregganegrogy*’ in Simington, Robert C., *Books of Survey and Distribution: being abstracts of various surveys and instruments of title, 1636-1703:Vol.3, County Galway*, Parish of Killyan, p. 260.
- ⁹⁴ Based on the *Strafford Survey* of 1633-36 Dr. Petty’s map for Connacht is not an isometry and has other defects also. Nonetheless Dr. Petty’s map of Killihane Barony in Co. Galway shows the (un-named) *Cloonlion* River flowing southwards until it meets the larger eastward-flowing *River Shiven* which in turn joins the *River Suck*. An island is distinctly shown up-river on the *Cloonlion* River.
- ⁹⁵ A short section of a former trench has been infilled, giving the landowner easy access to the whole site.
- ⁹⁶ Note that ‘*abhann*’ has the Connacht pronunciation ‘owen’(e.g. the *Owenriff* river in *Connemara*).
- ⁹⁷ ‘*Math/on/wy*’ is evidently Irish written phonetically in Middle Welsh. Not knowing whether *Mathonwy* was male or female, *Rachel Bromwich* interpreted ‘-wy’ as possibly indicating a matronymic. See *Bromwich, Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, p. 448.
- ⁹⁸ The Welsh poem *Cad Goddeu* mentions *Arawn*, *Mat*, *Gwydion* and *Blodeuwedd* (*Bláth Diuid* – ‘Simple Flower’ - she was made from flowers), and closes with a very obscure reference to metalwork. Apropos this, a well-qualified professional archaeologist who visited *Mat*’s abode ‘*Caer Dathyl*’ with the present writer on a very superficial examination of the debris there picked up several fragments of a material which he identified as iron slag of a type which he dated to early medieval times. The iron pan which abounds beneath the land surface (even in bogs) in the surrounding locality could (he said) have provided the raw material for iron-making. *Mat* and *Gwydion* may have engaged in metalwork and been deemed to be magicians for so doing.
- ⁹⁹ *Gwydion: Gabb(a) Aedh Donn* ?? Poem XLV in *Book of Taliesin* is titled ‘The Death-song of *Aeddon Mór*’ – he being ‘*Mighty/Renowned Aedh Donn*’. The poet states that *Aedh*

- Donn* came from 'the country of Gwyddion' which is at Regia Altera. The poem mentions Mat and Gwydion's brother Amaethon (*Oghma Donn* ??).
- ¹⁰⁰ Math fab Mathonwy: The Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi, online at www.mabinogi.net/math.htm, accessed on 2.1.2018.
- ¹⁰¹ Presumably they entered Connacht either at Athlone or at Lanesborough.
- ¹⁰² Letter from Clanricarde and St. Albans to Ormond. John Lowe (ed.), *Letter-Book of the Earl of Clanricarde, 1643-47*, pp. 120-121. Clanricarde pointed out why this was militarily a critically important ford.
- ¹⁰³ Trinity College Dublin: MS 830, fol. 110^b, 1641 Depositions.
- ¹⁰⁴ Confiscated lands included lands of Teige Hugh McDonagh O'Kelly of Garrower, slain in rebellion. Griffith, *Calendar of the Irish Patents Rolls of James I*, p. 162.
- ¹⁰⁵ Patent Roll 13 James I, *Calendar of the Irish Patents Rolls of James I*, p. 297.
- ¹⁰⁶ Simington, Robert C., *Books of Survey and Distribution: being abstracts of various surveys and instruments of title, 1636-1703: Vol. 3, County Galway*, p. 264.
- ¹⁰⁷ Felinrhyd is deemed by some Welsh scholars to be the 'y uelen rhyd' of the legend of Math. 'Felen' (sic) is the modern Welsh language form of the Middle Welsh word 'melyn' meaning 'golden', 'yellow', 'sallow', etc., but 'felin' (sic) seemingly refers to a mill, not to a colour. [See 'felin' in the Welsh dictionary *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*.] A local pronunciation as 'Felenrhyd' smacks of probable indoctrination. [Grammatically, the feminine form of *melyn* is '*melen*' which becomes '*uelen*' in Middle Welsh after the definite article. In modern spelling '*melen*' becomes 'felen' (not '*felin*').]
- ¹⁰⁸ The Suckside land labelled '*carra*' on Dr. Petty's map for Killihane Barony, Co. Galway corresponds to the location of the ford of Garrower. The Irish word '*carra*' means 'causeway' or 'stepping-stones' and indicates the presence of a ford here, but occasionally in phonetically-written anglicized forms of Irish place-names '*carra*' is a corruption of '*cora*' meaning 'a weir'.
- ¹⁰⁹ Historical Mapping, online at: <https://www.osi.ie/products/professional-mapping/historical-mapping/>
- ¹¹⁰ At the precise location of the old weir a metal bridge can still be seen on Google maps, albeit in decay, above the first bend on the River Suck upstream from Mount Talbot bridge (at GPS: 53.532886, -8.293095). This metal bridge was erected by the Talbots to provide a short route by horse and carriage to Castle Kelly (*alias* Aughrane Castle), which they frequently visited in the 19th century.
- ¹¹¹ GPS: Fort A (53.546698, -8.291148); Fort B (53.545625, -8.290107).
- ¹¹² 'Cloon' (Ir.: *cluain*) has a number of possible meanings in Irish. For the purposes of this book it may be taken either as 'the meadowland' (usually bordering a river) or 'the watershed'.
- ¹¹³ For a modern aerial view of the proximity of these forts to each other, see the photo published in Connolly, Paul, *Mount Talbot - A Journey through the Ages*, (Paul Connolly, 2014), p. 7.
- ¹¹⁴ As for the location of *Nant Call* where the immeasurable conflict took place as Pryderi's "men of the south" were *in retreat*, the name and local topography suggest that the battleground was *Síodh Neannta*, now called 'Fairymount' near Drumdaff, Co. Roscommon. *Síodh Neannta* is on the route towards the ford *Áth Liag Fhinn* (Lanesboro)

on the Shannon which gives entry to Leinster and the south. ‘*Neannta*’ is a component of only two place-names in this part of Galway/Roscommon, the other being *Corr Neannta* which lies west of the Suck. Pryderi’s men were seemingly harried into this narrowing funnel-shaped “pass” or neck of land which is flanked by bogs to its north and south (see Google’s satellite map of the region). *Nant Call* is evidently a substituted name, possibly prompted by *Neannta*, unless the Irish name of this neck or gap had been *Col Neannta*; (Ir.: *col* = col; geographically a col is a pass or gap, though usually nowadays in a mountainous region; also Latin: *collum* – a neck).

Although in Aberconwy in Wales there was a Cistercian grange called *Nant Call Grange*, this fact is evidently quietly overlooked by those seeking the Welsh site of Pryderi’s defeat by Math. Clearly ‘men of the south’ would not be *retreating* if they went northwards to this *Nant Call* after the early skirmish at the twin forts where Math had awaited Pryderi in the Welsh version of the tale. Further, the distance from this Nant Call to Maentwrog, (whereat Pryderi was supposedly buried – according to some sources), would serve to make the Welsh interpretation of this legend absurd. Maentwrog is about six miles from Felinrhyd and these towns are not even on the same river, nor does Pryderi’s tomb exist at Maentwrog. David H. Williams, *The Welsh Cistercians: Written to Commemorate the Centenary of the Death of Stephen William Williams*, (Bodmin, 2001), p. 196.

¹¹⁵ Called ‘Killardekeele’ (i.e. *Cill Ard Coille*) in Robert C. Simington, *Book of Survey and Distribution*, Tisrara Parish, Co. Roscommon.

¹¹⁶ Ir.: *Tol* is also spelt *tul*.

¹¹⁷ The word “Mound” is printed on the 1841 OSI map in the woodland beside Mount Talbot House.

¹¹⁸ Photo courtesy Paul Connolly, Mount Talbot.

¹¹⁹ In ‘The Textual Notes’ for page 60 in *The Mabinogion*, Gwyn Jones has stated that in the original MSS the place of Pryderi’s burial is given as Maen Tyuyawc. (Jones, Gwyn, and Jones, Thomas, *The Mabinogion*, London, 1948). Maen Tyuyawc was amended to Maen Tyryawc by Lady Charlotte Guest, in order that she might identify it with Maentwrog in Wales. Subsequently Rachel Bromwich gave the original place-name Maen Tyuyawc as the place of Pryderi’s grave but for some unexplained reason she still identified it with Maentwrog in Wales, as Lady Guest had done. (Rachel Bromwich, ‘Notes to Personal Names’, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, p. 486.) The form given in the Internet version of ‘*The Mabinogi of Math*’ and in some other sources is ‘Maen Tyuynawc’. This decodes as *Maon-tighe Uanach* – ‘The Dumb-house of Leisure’ – a questionably cheery name for a grave, perhaps giving further insight into the gaelic storyteller’s grey sense of humour.

¹²⁰ The implication is that this pig-war legend is based on some true historical event. Pryderi’s war-band approached the Suck from the east and some contestants went home westward across the Suck following their defeat. When considered in the knowledge that *Cluain Laighean* (Cloonlyon) townland lies west of the River Suck, this hints that the war may have been a confrontation with the *Laighean*. The *Laighean* are often equated with the *Domnainn* and the *Gaili6in*, and as such are often given the same origins as the Dumnonii of Britain. T. F. O’Rahilly, renowned Irish scholar of the Celtic languages, (particularly in the field of Historical Linguistics and Irish dialects) deemed them to have had the same ancestry, if not being the same people. The *Laighean* are deemed to have been the politically dominant element in Connacht at the time of the Goidelic invasion. Thomas Francis O’Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology*, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1946.

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- ¹²² (i) H. T. Knox, 'The Early Tribes of Connaught' Parts I and II, *Proceedings of the Royal Antiquaries Society of Ireland*, 1900 and 1901 resp.; pp. 343-356 and 109-117, resp. (ii) H. T. Knox, 'The Expansion of Two Royal Tribes of Connacht', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. IV, 1905-06.
- ¹²³ Gearoid MacNiocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, Gill and Macmillan (Dublin, 1972), p. 37.



Pyderi's tumulus on Mount Talbot, Co. Roscommon



St. Brendan's Well at 'Caer Dathyl'.



The gnomon post-hole in Mallolwch's sun-arena, now called Cluain Patrick in Co. Roscommon.



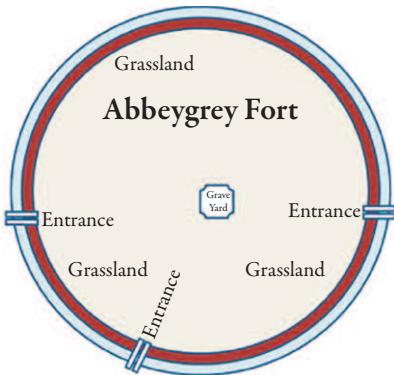
Pre-historic standing stone (broken) in Killeroran – formerly called Cluain Acha Liag



The La Tène egg-stone. An Ubh Éin or Annwfnyn. (c.150 BC- 325 BC.)



A simple shrine erected at St. Patrick's "Well" or gnomon post-hole in Mallolwch's sun-arena, now called Cluain Patrick.



Structure of Abbeygrey fort, alias Regia Altera – the abode of Mallolwch king of Ireland.



Mallolwch's sun-arena in shallow flood.

Section Two

Caer Sidi, Welsh Normans and King Rory O’Conor

[The following interpretation of the Welsh poem ‘Preiddeu Annwn’ is based on the present writer’s research, mainly using Professor Sarah Higley’s translation in: ‘The Camelot Project...’¹ and supported by that collated by Charles Squire² from four different translations of the text. Line numbers (shown in brackets) are those used by Sarah Higley.]

Preiddeu Annwn – in English *The Spoils of Annwfn* – is a poem in Middle Welsh which exists in the manuscript now called *The Book of Taliesin*. The poem is currently promulgated by scholars as the composition of an alleged medieval Welsh poet Taliesin, and up to this point has never been deemed to be related to any reality in Ireland.³ But such an authorship could not account for the several names of people and places in the poem which are Irish written phonetically.⁴ One deduces from these names that originally the poem was possibly written in Irish.⁵

The present writer asserts that the poem is a poetic account of a real event, that event being the plundering of a medieval abbey at Abbeygreay on *Sliabh Seana-thuath*, and the taking from it of ‘spoils’ in the form of a cache of manuscripts of the poetry and legends of the ‘chief of *Annwfn*’ (15) who at the time was king Rory O’Conor. The implication is that these manuscripts were in the care of scribes at that abbey – evidently Cistercian⁶ – where they probably had been compiled. The poet, who evidently not only witnessed the raid but followed the leader of the raiding party into the abbey, refers to this set of manuscripts poetically as an ornamented ‘cauldron’ belonging to the *chief of Annwfn* (15,16).⁷

As to the poem’s content, it contains so many very obscure references that one of its translators, Thomas Stephens (1876) has called it “one of the least intelligible of the mythological poems”.⁸ In somewhat similar vein Lady Guest (1877) called it “a mystical poem which appears to be full of allusions to traditions now no longer intelligible”.⁹ In consequence, Welsh Celtic scholars have generated some rather bizarre interpretations of many of its

lines. The fact is that the poem does not belong to Wales. Because it is extremely places-specific and time-specific the poem seems intriguing and enigmatic, and is not intelligible to those readers ignorant of the poet's topography and its history. A deduction from this is that the poet had intimate local knowledge of the district in which the event took place, and so was gaelic.

Some of the poet's own poetry was scribed in these manuscripts (13). This permanence which commitment to parchment seemingly offered him, ensured for him that his "*bardic invocation*" would last "*till Judgement*" (day) (8). But from this disclosure that his own poetry was in these manuscripts one deduces that at some earlier time he must have visited this abbey himself in order to have his poetry put on record there for '*the chief of Annwfn*' (15). Hence, the gaelic author of *The Spoils of Annwfn* must have been a poet of great distinction. That being so, he would have been a person who was familiar with the important and foremost sagas and poetry of his era.

The poem *The Spoils of Annwfn* mentions no abbey, but it makes unambiguous that the raided building housed monks (49, 53). It refers poetically to the abbey in various ways: (i) *Caer Ochren*, (ii) *Caer Sidi*, (iii) the *Fortress of God's Peak*, (iv) the *Fortress of Hindrance* (or *Impediment*), (v) the *Glass Fortress*, (vi) the *Fortress of Mead-Drunkenness* and (vii) the *Fortress of Hardness*. It will be shown that all these descriptions are found to be apt when one is knowledgeable about the Abbeygreys site in the context of local topography and relevant local history. One shall first deal with the name *Caer Ochren*.

The word 'ochren' does not arise in Welsh; hence *Caer Ochren* has been a problematic appellation for a fortress. Nonetheless, some translators have suggested meanings for it. Perhaps it is because in Welsh 'ochr' means 'side' that one translator has suggested its translation as the *Fortress of Enclosedness*. On the other hand another has translated *Caer Ochren* as *Angular Fortress*. Abbeygreys was indeed enclosed, but it could not be less angular.

In his book *Taliesin* John Matthews has revealed a different line of thought, suggesting that *Caer Ochren* may be the Fort of Achren, Achren being a lady mentioned in another poem in Welsh found in the *Book of Taliesin*, one of two compositions titled *Cad Goddeu*.¹⁰ *Cad Goddeu* is given two different titles in English: *The Battle of Achren* and *The Battle of the Trees*. The main contestants in *The Battle of the Trees* were Bran, Arawn,

Gwydion, and a lady named Achren. Mathews has suggested that Ochren is another variation of this lady's name. All these contestants in *Cad Goddeu* are pre-historic characters.

The Battle of the Trees was caused by the theft of property from the king of Annwfn.¹¹ The battle site ought therefore be near Annwfn and Regia Altera. From a careful consideration of names given to the Castlekelly woodlands it becomes evident that the fictional *Battle of the Trees* took place in these remnants of an ancient forest. The contestant Bran gave rise to the name Bran's Wood – already mentioned as the ancient name of these woodlands. In the early 18th century the name Bran's Wood was superseded¹² and at about the same time the name of Bran's opponent in *The Battle of the Trees* – that is, the lady Achren – replaced it. Recorded variations are Aghran,¹³ (pronounced 'Akran'¹⁴) Aghrane,¹⁵ and Aughrane,¹⁶ the latter being pronounced 'Och-rain' locally. Hence the matched pairs – Aghran/Achren and Aughrane/Ochren – are all phonetic renderings in English and in Welsh of the same legendary lady's name. The conclusion to be drawn is that *The Battle of the Trees* has been embedded into the Regia Altera landscape. One notes in passing that these ancient woodlands abound in a range of tree species, and in a riot of bluebells in particular – these being flowers mentioned in the poem *Cad Goddeu*.

Aughrane Castle, (shown in the map, Fig. 8) was situated in these old woodlands, scarcely a mile from Caer Ochren (*alias* Abbeygrey) and much less than that from Killnerea – the ancient royal cemetery and *ónach* site. A bizarrely unique connection was forged between Caer Ochren and Aughrane Castle when the castle's owner, Denis H. Kelly (d. 1877), carted the last stones from the abbey ruins to remodel his castle home – also known as Castle Kelly.

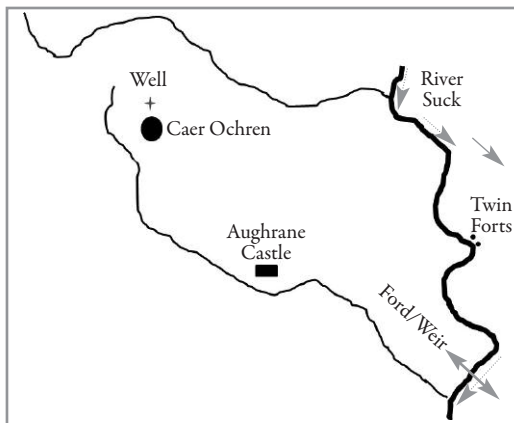


Figure 8. *Regia Altera, alias Caer Ochren, Caer Sidi, Abbeygrey, etc.*

As with Annwfn, the place Caer Sidi too is promulgated in Welsh scholarly literature as an *Otherworld*.¹⁷ Happily, the topography of the place is so uniquely and accurately described in information found in a number of poems in the book *Taliesin* that one can no longer contend in any intellectually honest way that Caer Sidi is some praetor-natural place.¹⁸ This information describes perfectly the topography of Regia Altera, *alias* Abbeygrey.

The map herewith (Fig. 8) shows the position of Caer Ochren and Aughrane Castle. Also indicated is the ford on the Suck at Garrower (*alias* Uelen Rhyd), roughly 3.5km. from Caer Ochren. Special features of the location of Caer Ochren are *a.* there is a well situated about 250 metres due north of it¹⁹ and *b.* it is almost entirely surrounded by the waters of three rivers whose spatial inter-relationship is *geographically exact* in Fig. 8.²⁰

The foregoing features were mentioned by the composer of the Welsh poem titled *Song before the Sons of Llyr* in the book *Taliesin*.²¹ Referring to Caer Sidi he wrote: “*the abundant well is above it, sweeter than white wine is the drink in it*”.²² As there is no well or spring nearer to the fortress than this one, the information from the poem implies that it was this well which supplied the abbey’s drinking water which, one may note with hygiene in mind, came from ground higher than the abbey.

Evidently fully aware that Caer Sidi was bordered by rivers, the same poet stated²³: “*And around its borders (sic) are the streams of the ocean*”.²⁴ As Fig. 8 shows, two of the three rivers surrounding Caer Sidi are small tributaries of the Suck. One first flows southwards, passing through the former gardens of Aughrane Castle (where there was formerly a private wooden bridge and possibly an ancient ford leading to the royal enclosure²⁵) before veering to the south-east to join the Suck. The second flows almost due east ‘above’ the abbey site.

Another reference to Caer Sidi, found in an anonymous medieval Welsh poem also found in the *Book of Taliesin*, makes allusion to the triple-ring, wheel-like structure of Regia Altera. Titled *Taliesin’s Golden Chair* by Professor Patrick Sims-Williams the poet states: “*I have a golden chair in Caer Sidi in a hallowed wheel (gwenrod²⁶) rotating as one of three circles.*”²⁷ *I am amazed that everyone does not perceive (it)*”. Fig. 2 may now be re-considered as the composite of three concentric rings composed of a wide circular fosse which encloses wide circular ramparts which in turn bound a

large circular disc of abbey grounds. It can be imagined as a rotating wheel.

This *Caer Sidi* 'wheel' was deemed by the poet to be hallowed or heavenly because he knew he was referring to sacred abbey ground. Whence, the latter quotation not only reveals that the poet, who was speaking in the present tense, had profound and uncommon insights into the unique topographical and structural peculiarities of this abbey, which not all others shared. It also informs us that the poet was actually resident in *Caer Sidi* when it was an abbey. The conclusion to be drawn is that this was a *gaelic* poet who, as a bard, frequented the abbey and stayed comfortably there for periods of time. The title *Taliesin's Golden Chair* given to this poem by Patrick Sims-Williams places the spurious Taliesin comfortably in Abbeygrey. This not only demolishes the notion that the poem is by Taliesin but discredits the very notion that there was ever such a medieval poet, Welsh or otherwise.²⁸ Further, in the journal *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* this poem has been given a different name and has been ascribed to the Welsh court-poet Meilyr Brydydd,²⁹ an example of how Irish poetry in the book *Taliesin* has been assigned to Welsh poets.

As to why the abbey mountain site should be called *Caer Sidi* by the poet one can but speculate intelligently. *Caer Sidi* is the Welsh format for Irish *Cathair Sidhe*, meaning 'the fort of the fairies'. The reference to *Caer Sidi* at the abbey mountain site on *Sliabh seana-thuath* is a reference to the *Tuatha Dé Danann*³⁰ who, in Irish pseudo-history, were pre-historic and pre-goidelic invaders of Ireland. Allegedly they landed in Connacht which became their stronghold. Regia Altera lies about 35 miles east of the site of the legendary first Battle of Moytura where the *Fir Bolg* and the *Tuatha Dé Danann* did battle, whilst the site of the second Battle of Moytura in which the *Tuatha Dé Danann* fought the Fomorians near Lough Arrow in Co. Sligo is about 32 miles north of Regia Altera. Therefore, the possibility that Regia Altera was at one time the royal palace of the *Tuatha Dé Danann* must be entertained. Being a legendary exceptionally dexterous people, these *Tuatha* (= 'tribes') were deemed to be magicians by those whom they conquered.

According to popular myth, following their defeat by the Milesians in *The Battle of Tailteann*, the *Tuatha Dé Danann* lived on eternally within the mountains and hills, becoming the fairies in popular myth.³¹ It is possible that the mountain nomenclature *Sliabh seana-thuath* is due to these tribes.

However, another pre-goidelic group of *tuatha* or tribes – viz. the *Tuatha Taidhean* – subsequently inhabited this high ground too,³² giving some early kings to Connacht (earlier known as Olnegmacht³³) and complicating the information. In any case, because the name of this remote mountain mound so distinctly evoked ‘old *tuatha*’, the poet possibly deemed that the monks, by deciding to reside in an abbey at this particular place, had emulated these *Tuatha Dé Danann* ‘fairies’, and so he referred to their abbey home as ‘the fortress of the fairies’ or *Caer Sidi*. Janet Burton observed: “The Cistercians cultivated the image of themselves as *desert monks*, and their regulations stated that their abbeys should be located far from the dwellings of men, or, in the words of Orderic Vitalis, ‘in lonely wooded places.’”³⁴

In the poem in Welsh titled *Songs before the Sons of Llyr* a passage reads: “*Complete is my bardic chair in Caer Sidi, No one will be afflicted with disease or old age that may be in it. Manawyddan and Pryderi know it.*”³⁵ This quote implies primarily that Manawyddan (*Manadán*) and Pryderi knew the poet’s bardic chair. As this pair was among the seven who, in the tale *Branwen daughter of Llyr*, survived the slaughter at *Mat Sol Loc*’s residence, they ought indeed have known *Caer Sidi* on that account. But for them to know the poet’s bardic chair itself could be so only if there were recitations of these legends *from* the bardic chair. This is insinuated by the poet who divulged that at *Abbeygrey* he was comfortably seated, with music and a comfortable fire. It also seems that *triads* may have been recited³⁶ or sung there.³⁷ Whence, *Abbeygrey* evidently was a place where these tales were recited. The fairy magic of the bardic chair, implied by the assertion that no one in it grows old, again raises the question: Was this at one time a *Tuatha Dé Danann* royal residence?

Two particular lines of *The Spoils of Annwfn*: “*Except seven, none returned from Caer Ochren*” (48) and “*Except seven, none returned from Caer Sidi*” (10) place the battle between Bran, king of the Britains, and *Mat Sól Loc* (*alias* *Mallolwch*) king of Ireland exactly at this ancient fortress now called ‘*Abbeygrey*’. As this fortress was the *Regia Altera* of Ptolemy’s Map of Hibernia, the identification of the residence of *Mat Sól Loc* provides support for the assertion that the legend *Branwen daughter of Llyr* is based on some real event at this place.

The lines “*Six thousand men stood upon the wall*” (31), “*Except seven none returned*” (10, 22, 28, 34, 42, 48), are evidently poetic references made at

Abbeygreycy to the number of persons assembled on these ramparts and to the number of survivors in the aforementioned Mabinogi legend *Branwen daughter of Llyr*.³⁸ The number "six thousand" is highly significant. A calculation of the standing area on the 25-foot-thick ramparts at Abbeygreycy will confirm that it approximates 5,500 square yards. This area is just adequate standing-room for 6,000 armed medieval warriors. From this detail one sees once again that the poet had intimate knowledge of his environment.

A clue to the background of the Abbeygreycy attackers is given in their number – "*three fullnesses of Prydwen*" (9,27,33) and in their leader's name – "*Arthur*" (21, 30, 41, 47) – that being a 'cypher' for his real name. "Arthur" and "Prydwen" are references from Welsh mythology to King Arthur and to his ship Prydwen, and so they identify the attackers as an armed Welsh host. A valuable clue to the strength of the raiding party is given by the words "*three fullnesses of Prydwen*". Mindful that the Welsh Norman Robert Fitzstephen had been released from prison by his first cousin Rhys ap Gruffydd, later called *Prince of Wales*,³⁹ to lead the first invasion of Normans into Ireland in 1169, and had landed in Bannow Bay in three ships, the present writer estimates that, as a reasonable guideline, three *full* ships could carry roughly 600 men.⁴⁰

This detail of the number involved in the abbey raid corresponds to a precise historic event when Milo De Cogan, spurred by fellow Norman invader John Carew's adventure into Ulster very early in 1177⁴¹ in hope of personal gain, lost no time in imitating him by making the first Norman incursion into Connacht with 540 Norman knights and archers.⁴² At that time the '*chief of Annwfn*' (15) who owned the '*cauldron*' of literature was Rory O'Conor, King of Connacht and High King of Ireland. King Rory's son Murrough, to spite his father against whom he had some deep grudge, had invited the Normans into Connacht, and had assured them of great advantages from accepting the invitation.⁴³ He himself offered to conduct them through Connacht.⁴⁴ On this expedition De Cogan was accompanied by his first cousin Ralph Fitzstephen⁴⁵ and possibly also by Robert Fitzstephen, father of Ralph and uncle and 'brother-in-arms'⁴⁶ of Milo de Cogan. All were close blood relations of Rhys ap Gruffydd.

De Cogan's incursion into Connacht proved disastrous. The reasons become transparent from the specific details of the sequence of events.

According to *Annals*,⁴⁷ on reaching Roscommon town unmolested, he was joined there by Murrough O'Connor.⁴⁸ Audaciously, De Cogan summoned King Rory O'Connor to join him in the incursion⁴⁹ and awaited him in Roscommon for three nights, Rory being at the time in a remote part of his kingdom.⁵⁰ Ignoring the request to accompany a foreign invader into his homelands, King Rory left De Cogan's party to rely entirely on its own resources. Thereafter De Cogan's progress became unexpectedly difficult⁵¹ because the Irish country-folk, on seeing the approaching Normans, and knowing full well that they aimed to enrich themselves by plunder, had removed their cattle and belongings to safe places⁵² and took themselves into hiding in impenetrable woodlands and hills.⁵³ They also burned churches, both to destroy any unhidden valuables they necessarily had left behind in these⁵⁴ and to prevent the invading Normans from using churches to store their supplies.⁵⁵ Thus the Norman host, probably rendered irate and affronted by King Rory's snub, unexpectedly found neither people nor provisions nor a convenient repository of supplies throughout the whole of the way and so faced the utmost distress. They penetrated as far as Tuam unresisted.

The ancient winter route between Roscommon and Tuam necessarily crossed the Suck at the ford at Garrower,⁵⁶ passing very close to both the abbey then in existence at Abbeygrey and the island fortress which has been identified as 'Caer Dathyl' (Fig. 6). Sarah Higley has pointed out that *Preiddeu* can mean "cattle" or "herds".⁵⁷ This meaning agreeably elucidates the historic context because De Cogan and his war-band, finding themselves in enemy territory in the midst of solitude and without food or forage, had immediate need for supplies and a place to store them. This pressing need provided a strong motive for an attack on Abbeygrey. 'Caer Dathyl' being close at hand, and on route to Tuam from Abbeygrey, would have been a militarily intelligent choice of place to secure spoils and provisions pending foreseen inevitable retreat from Tuam.

De Cogan spent three nights in Tuam before being put to flight by the people of that place. Then, on his ignominious retreat towards Dublin, his party was way-laid by King Rory's army in woodland near the Shannon at Athlone and the treacherous Murrough O'Connor was captured and barbarously punished.⁵⁸

The total incursion into Connacht lasted eight days,⁵⁹ and the

expedition can be examined in terms of time of year, route, journey lengths and days taken. De Cogan would have necessarily forded the Suck at Garrower.⁶⁰ As this ford is about 27 miles from Tuam along present roads,⁶¹ he would have been obliged for safety reasons, as he retreated from Tuam after three nights in that town, to spend one further night somewhere near the Suck with bag and baggage, and most likely west of it.⁶² The mathematical evidence therefore is that *four days* elapsed between De Cogan's first arrival at Abbeygrey from Co. Roscommon and his return to its vicinity.

The details of *The Spoils of Annwfn* will be shown not only to accord with the afore-mentioned strength of De Cogan's Norman band, but also with a four-day duration spent by the poet in Co. Galway, involving two real places. The first of these places was the Abbeygrey monastery itself.

The term *Fortress of Hindrance* (34) applied to Abbeygrey was a reference to the enormous annular mound 600 feet across and 700 feet overall, surrounded by a fosse 25 feet wide.⁶³ It is no surprise that the raid-leader 'Arthur' entered only with "*brilliant difficulty*" (21) and as any of the three entrances to the abbey was more than 100 yards from the centre of the abbey grounds, and the fosse and impeding high-fenced⁶⁴ rampart intervened, it is understandable that the poet found that "*it was difficult to speak with their sentinel*"(32).

As for the poetic term the *Fortress of God's Peak* (42), Cistercian monasteries commonly had a tower on their churches, the latter being cruciform in shape. Sometimes circumstances dictated that the tower was built later than the monastery church itself. The octagonal tower at Duiske Cistercian abbey at Graiguenamanagh, in Co. Kilkenny, though built later than the 1204 cruciform abbey church on which it stands, was nevertheless constructed over the transept, supported by enormous arches. The description *Fortress of God's Peak* not only associates Abbeygrey with God and religion, but also indicates that the abbey had a tower. Duiske Abbey, founded in 1204, is also a good example of the medieval use of glass, its ample and architecturally important windows being in contrast with e.g. pre-historic glassless stone fortresses. The term *Glass Fortress*(30) was probably indicative of the poet's awe of similar windows in the abbey on *Sliabh Seana-tuath*, a probable novelty in the West of Ireland at that time.

The title *Fortress of Mead-Drunkness*(22) indicates that the monks at Abbeygrey kept bees, and would have produced mead (and probably also

wines and beer), it being a monastic staple in medieval Cistercian abbeys.⁶⁵ At the provincial council in Holy Trinity Cathedral in Dublin in 1186 where the delinquency of clergy who had come over to Ireland from England and Wales and were living in concubinage was denounced, a humiliated Giraldus Cambrensis countered by accusing Irish monks of drunkenness, but he praised their chastity, devotion to prayer, observance of canonical hours and their perseverance in fasting and abstinence, etc.⁶⁶ Stanza III of the poem strongly suggests that the Norman raiders took every liberty to help themselves liberally to the typical drinks of the Abbeygrey community.

From two papal letters⁶⁷ one knows that the abbey on *Sliabh Seana-thuath* became a ruin, and that ruins of its *cruciform* church still existed there c.1370. In c.1440 the abbey site, together with ½qr. of associated land then called ‘the roode land’, was handed over to Carmelites⁶⁸ who had been given permission by the temporal lord and by Pope Eugene IV to build a monastery on it. Strictly, a ½qr. of land is 50 acres, but in this part of Co. Galway it was sometimes more. Whatever the exact acreage of ‘the roode land’, the monks at *Sliabh Seana-thuath* at the time of the Welsh Norman raid were seemingly occupying at least 50 acres of ‘mountain’ land. From the poet’s reference to *The meadows of Defwy* (38) one knows that they knew this land as *The Meadows of God of Victory*.⁶⁹

The knowledge that Abbeygrey was a place where bards recited poems and narrated stories gives insight into the possible meaning of the line “*Who made him who did not go to the Meadows of Defwy*”(38). This is not necessarily a direct question; it could be interpreted as a typically colloquial Irish way of implying indirectly that ‘everybody who was anybody’⁷⁰ went there. Such gatherings to hear sagas, poetry and perhaps music would merely be an affirmation of the respect which Cistercian monks, more so than other religious Orders, showed for the culture of the peoples among whom they worked.

In the poem the description *Fortress of Hardness* (28) is the translator’s interpretation of the Welsh wording ‘*caer rigor*’. But ‘*rigor*’, a Latin word, has meanings other than ‘hardness’. It also can mean ‘*severity*’ and even ‘*coldness*’. If known for nothing else, the lifestyle in medieval Cistercian abbeys was noted for its severity, and this was especially so when compared with Benedictine monasteries of that era. Though both of these Orders were

committed to the *Rule of St. Benedict*, from early in the twelfth century Cistercians placed *manual labour* firmly back in their daily time-table, together with liturgy and reading.⁷¹ Further to this, Cistercians adopted simplicity and austerity in their buildings, deemed by Bernard of Clairvaux to be appropriate to the Cistercians' desire for poverty. This austerity in their physical environment was matched by simplicity of lifestyle in terms of what they ate and drank, and how they dressed – matters which contrasted with traditional Benedictine monks, especially with Cluniac monks. The sloppy-looking and inoffensive sleeves of medieval Cistercians' attire (Fig. 9)



Figure 9. Sleeves of a medieval Cistercian's garb.

prompted the haughty war-groomed poet to quip “*I do not merit little men, slack their shield straps*”(35). In particular, Cistercians rose before dawn for prayers and religious chants, likened by the scoffing poet to ‘howls’ (49). This practice of rising early for prayer seemingly prompted his quip “*They do not know when midnight and dawn divide*”(55).

The medieval tripper trekking from Roscommon Town to Abbeygrey in February or March in 1177 would be unlikely to forget the weather. Strong winds, possibly thunderbolts, almost incessant rain, brimming rivers and lakes, over-flowing boglands and soft ground underfoot would likely leave a lasting impression on his mind. In this context it is not strange to find weather-related questions in the poem *Preiddeu Annwfnyn: Is there one course of wind? Is there one course of water? Is there one spark of fire of fierce tumult?*(51). Odd though these questions be, given the era and context, they could be regarded as snide taunts or, at best, as questions to encourage curiosity about the real world. In contrast to monastic living where monks' lives revolved around liturgy, labour and spiritual reading, the poet deemed that he himself lived in the company of “*lords who know*”(50, 54).⁷² Probably deeming the monks to be living obediently in an unreal world parallel to his own, the poet may be mockingly asking how do they experience the basic elements of wind, fire and water in that world. Or, mindful that new

developments and ideas were spreading throughout 12th century Europe, he may be prodding them to open up their closed (?) minds to new ideas, beginning by asking some basic worldly questions. “*I merit not the Lord’s little men of letters*” (29) underscores the ‘sword versus pen’ class-war of the era. Stanzas V and VI of the poem pour scorn on these men of letters – from which instance one concludes that the politics of knowledge is not new.

Another perplexing comment is “*They do not know which day the chief was created*” (44). The reference being to the monks, the chief was some senior cleric. Here one is dealing with a very disturbed and reforming 12th century Irish church, deemed to be backward, sinful and out of tune with the rest of Christendom. Strategies of renewal gave rise to at least seven conventions or synods at national or provincial level between 1100 and 1205. For monks housed in a remote Connaught abbey in 1177, keeping in step with the course of various ‘external’ power struggles involving resistance by traditional ecclesiastical dynasties to the imposition of foreigners as bishops and abbots could have been as problematic at Abbeygrey as at other monasteries.⁷³ It was because of the aforementioned detachment from Rome that Pope Adrian IV, an Englishman, had urged the invasion of Ireland in which De Cogan and the abbey attackers, including the poet, were participating, the Pope basing his right to do so on the forged document *The Donation of Constantine*.⁷⁴

In the same vein as line 44 is the next line: “(They do not know) *what hour*⁷⁵ *of the midday the owner (perchen) was born (ganet)*” (45). In Welsh ‘perchen’ translates both as ‘owner’ and as ‘lord’. This line seemingly alludes to the lord of ‘the kingdom of Ireland’ – a newly-created lordship bestowed on King Henry II by grant of Pope Adrian IV. However, despite the poet’s innuendo to the effect that Henry’s lordship was overtly brought into existence, (M.W. *ganet*: ‘begotten’) there is in fact no papal letter which reveals its origin, though it is now accepted by historians that it *predated* the Norman Invasion. Apparently Henry’s privilege was unknown to Irish churchmen until the text of an alleged and unauthentic letter of Pope Alexander III, confirming Adrian’s concession, was read by Giraldus Cambrensis at a council at Waterford in 1173-4,⁷⁶ that is, some years *after* the Invasion. Nothing more is now known about that council, so it should not be surprising if there were monks at Abbeygrey in early 1177 who evidently knew nothing of it.

A puzzling line for which nobody has given a confident translation is “(They do not know) *on which midday hour Cwy was born*” (37). Scholars have not identified *Cwy*, nor is it even agreed that the word is a reference to a human character. Oblique references to the *Tuatha Dé Danann* have already been identified in the poem *Preiddeu Annwn*, an example being the identification of Regia Altera (i.e. Abbeygrey) as *Caer Sidi* – a magical place. Therefore *Cwy* may be a similar reference. The context is the legendary relationship between Lough Key (Co. Roscommon) – 30 miles from *Caer Sidi* – and the second Battle of Mágh Tuired. A version of the legend is that Key (Ir.: *Cé*), the druid of Nuada, king of the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, was grievously wounded by poisoned lances at this Battle against the Fomorians, and wandered from the battlefield in a state of madness until he reached a cairn or heap of stones in a plain, whereat he fell asleep. Whilst sleeping a lake burst up around him, drowning him; whence this lake is called *Loch Cé*, anglicised to ‘Lough Key’. One proposes that *Cwy* is Key, the poetic reference being perhaps to a forgotten legendary account of Key’s birth. Alternatively the allusion may be to the figurative ‘birth’ of the *Loch* itself.

That the bard who composed *The Spoils of Annwfn* stayed in a second place, not the abbey, is evident in his references to *The Four-Peaked Fortress* (12, 24)⁷⁷ and to the “*isle of the strong door*” (24). The only known island fortress on the Roscommon–Tuam route was the strategically placed ‘*Caer Dathyl*’ fortress on the Cloonlion River. Described in Section One of this booklet, the *single entrance* to the fortress was via a narrow raised *tóchar*, and it probably was secured by a very strong door. While waiting at this moated fortress the poet evidently observed that the springtime⁷⁸ river carried bog-water⁷⁹ from the surrounding up-river bogs which it drains. On average, these bogs are 20 feet deep – the equivalent of 6,500 years of bog growth.⁸⁰ Hence, poetically speaking, in that river “*flowing water and jet are mingled*” (25), soft jet being the product of water-logged timber compressed deep in bogs for eons. Alternatively this line may be a reference to the mingling here of the pristine waters of the little purl which tumbles into the jet-coloured waters of the springtime Cloonlion River.

The words “*four its revolutions*” (12), when applied to the fortress, reveal far more than the poet’s understanding of the universe in which he lived – that is, that Earth and everything fixed on Earth make one complete rotation every twenty-four hours. As it takes four days for any fixed structure to make

four revolutions, four days evidently was the length of time the poet was acquainted with the *Four-Peaked Fortress*. Seemingly indulging in relaxation, it was while here that his own “*poetry from the cauldron*” (13) was uttered,⁸¹ kindled from “*the breath of nine maidens*”(14). Here too he was “*honoured in praise*”(11), a revelation which generates suspicion that he had provided a valuable service to the Welsh Normans in the raid on the abbey, and perhaps was destined to provide even more. From his earlier visit or visits to the abbey he presumably had acquired accurate information as to where the cache of manuscripts could be found, and disclosure of this information may have been a service provided by him. That he considered himself brave is evident in his conviction that the seized ‘cauldron’ of poetry “*does not boil the food of a coward*”(17), its contents being the works of bards of high status, including himself. “*Song was heard in the Four-Peaked Fortress*”(11) and “*sparkling wine*” (26) was drunk, presumably wine seized from the abbey and drunk in revelry.⁸² However, singing at *The Four-Peaked Fortress* may also have been a gesture of acknowledgement that this place had a special legendary connection with singing, being the legendary abode of ‘Mat of the singing river’ (Mathonwy) and of *Guth Aioibhinn* (Goewin – ‘delightful voice’).

The information that the poet was acquainted with the moated fortress for four days, in conjunction with the evidence that four days elapsed between De Cogan’s departure from Roscommon (*via* the abbey and the island fortress), and his return to that general vicinity as he hastened to exit Connacht, imply that the poet and some Normans possibly had not proceeded to Tuam with Milo De Cogan and the main party at all. Very likely, given that the peasants had burned the churches, the impregnable fortress had been pressed into service to store supplies for the distressed adventurers. No splinter group could risk remaining in the abbey to guard supplies left there, or feel secure in so vast a place which had three access points. One suspects that it was on the hurried return of the main party from Tuam that the poet rejoined De Cogan. Hence this ‘*four revolutions*’ detail in the poem neatly harmonises with other details used to affirm that the afore-mentioned Welsh Norman exploit into Connacht in early 1177 was the occasion of the abbey raid to seize supplies and the manuscripts.

That the poet was disposed to likening some of his predatory Norman colleagues to wild animals is evident in the names Lleawch (*Seabhach*,⁸³

meaning 'hawk')(18) and Lleinawc (*Seimineach*, meaning 'beast')(19) given by him to two of them. Apart from these two instances, animals are twice mentioned elsewhere in the poem, one line deriding the monks with the words "they do not know what animal they keep, silver its head"(46). This reference to a silvery-headed⁸⁴ animal kept by farming monks can be interpreted in the knowledge that in medieval times Cistercian monks were famous for the production of wool from sheep. Breeds of sheep fall into two main classes – black-faced sheep and white-faced sheep. The former – the more common – are superior for growth and carcass traits; white-faced sheep are superior for wool production and for maternity traits, and the short glistening clean-white facial wool, framed by their longer curly neck wool, makes them seem silvery-headed. Cistercians chose a wool-bearing breed, and in that circumstance the reference in this line is seemingly to wool-producing white-faced sheep. The lines "They do not know the brindled ox, thick his (the?) headband. Seven score links on his collar. And when we went with Arthur, dolorous visit..."(39-42) are likely a figurative reference to a sturdy thieving chain-mailed Norman, perhaps one of the raid leaders, the numerous small meshed metal rings of his body-length hauberk giving rise to an overall brindled appearance.⁸⁵ The familiar *bó bhradach* (i.e. 'the thieving cow') in Ireland comes to mind, commonly called "the braddy cow".⁸⁶

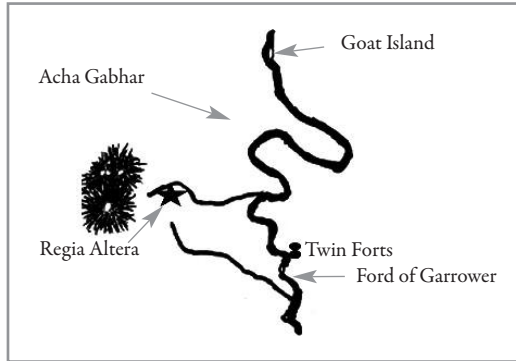


Figure 10. Goat-herding near Regia Altera.

From the names of legendary characters mentioned in the poem the first of the 'spoils' of this raid was the character *Gweir* (3). Heavy blue/gray chain is mentioned specifically as his prison (5,6). The chain mail worn by the Normans was blue/gray.

Gweir is mentioned several times in the love-story *Culhwch and Olwen* (3, 37).⁸⁷ Taken as Irish written phonetically this title decodes as *Cul-bhoc*⁸⁸ *agus Uaill-bhean*, meaning *He-goat*⁸⁹ and the *Vain/Illustrious Woman*.⁹⁰ An

implication of the title is that goat-herding took place in ancient times near Regia Altera.⁹¹ This is confirmed by the townland name *Acha Gabhar* meaning ‘The land of goats’ and by Goat Island nearby on the River Suck (Fig. 10). Both are in Fuerty Parish a short distance north of Abbeygrey.

Apropos the legend *Culhwch and Olwen*, the Welsh clergyman Giraldus Cambrensis, never missing an opportunity to vilify the Irish, evidently interpreted the Culhwch-Olwen relationship maliciously by putting on record that Rory O’Conor had a he-goat which bestially had intercourse with the woman who minded it for him.⁹² However, by hanging this outrageous allegation around O’Conor’s neck, Cambrensis indiscreetly let slip that he knew (c.1187 AD) not only that the legend *Culhwch and Olwen* was Irish, but also that it belonged to Connacht kings.⁹³ Giraldus’ brother Robert de Barry was likely to have been one of the abbey raiders and a first-hand source of information for Giraldus; Robert had sailed to Ireland with his uncle Robert Fitzstephen in 1169, the latter being De Cogan’s ‘comrade-in-arms’.⁹⁴

Gweir⁹⁵ was taken to his ‘equipped’ ‘prison’ in the abbey and “held” in “heavy blue/gray chain”(6). He was then followed⁹⁶ into ‘prison’ by *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, implied by “the account⁹⁷ of Pwyll and Pryderi”(4).⁹⁸ Then, as monks cowered before the flashing sword of the ‘Hawk’ (Lleawch)(18), another raider – the ‘Beast’ – (Lleminawc)(19) took the ‘cauldron’ of poems of many poets, plurality being implied by the words “our bardic invocation”(8).⁹⁹ The reference to the ‘Hawk’s’ flashing sword (18) and information that lamps burned “before the door of hell”(20) and that monks seemingly cowered in fear (53) serve to depict a scene of physical violence¹⁰⁰ to which the poet’s words “dolorous visit”(41) and “sorrowful strife”(47) suggest that a struggle took place in which people were injured, whilst the mention of *hell* conjures up the scenario of a place ablaze.¹⁰¹

The phrases “three fullnesses of Prydwen we went on the sea”(27) and “the grave of the saint is vanished, both grave and ground”(58), apparently refer to the poet’s emigration to Wales, having no more sight of Ireland. This probably took place in mid-May in 1177 when Milo De Cogan, Robert Fitzstephen and other Welsh Norman lords were recalled to England by King Henry II, De Cogan and Fitzstephen to be granted lands in the kingdom of Cork by Henry at that visit, wherein they lived out the short remainder of their violent lives trying to secure that grant.¹⁰²

The 'saint' is probably Saint Patrick, patron saint of Ireland who was very likely in general public consciousness at the time of year that the abbey raid took place,¹⁰³ evidently in Feb/March of 1177.¹⁰⁴ The 'ground' seemingly was Ireland which holds that saint's grave. Translator Sarah Higley has adverted to the gloomy note in this line, and to the sense of sadness and loss with which the poem ends: "*I praise the Lord, great prince, that I be not sad; Christ endows me.*" (59, 60) The poet, no doubt, was painfully aware of the cruel fate of Murrough O'Conor.

The conclusion from this research is that these particular legends and poetry were transferred as a 'batch' or collection of manuscript literature to Wales in 1177, and not by earlier normal vernacular trafficking as Kuno Meyer had suggested.¹⁰⁵ This transmission in 'batch-form' is precisely a deduction made by Professor John Carey¹⁰⁶ who convincingly argued that there was a "pervasive Irish influence on the composition of the first three branches of the *Mabinogi*" **through texts** that probably came from Ireland to Wales. Working with the former 9th century dating of *Culhwch and Olwen* he deemed this *cluster of texts* to have been transported in the ninth century, and were passed on all the way to France¹⁰⁷. The present writer's findings and those of John Carey explaining how the legends and poetry reached Wales are indirectly supported by that part of Professor Sims-Williams' research results which state that "there was very little traffic between Ireland and Wales, at least through the vernacular languages".¹⁰⁸ Following the 1177 raid on Abbeyleghy these documents were in the possession of persons connected to the Gruffydd royal bloodline, and were translated into Middle Welsh. John Carey's assertion that Welsh bards drew freely on these materials, *re-weaving their contents with the Welsh landscape* "in a spirit of intellectual self-assertion...."¹⁰⁹ stands up to scrutiny on condition that it is accepted that this happened after 1177.¹¹⁰ It can be confidently argued that not a syllable of them ever passed the lips of a medieval Welsh storyteller.¹¹¹

A consideration of literature which corroborates this rather precise dating of the Welsh versions of the Mabinogi legends and certain Middle Welsh poems now follows. In a series of articles published in 1969-71¹¹² the celebrated Welsh historian Saunders Lewis¹¹³ dated the Mabinogi to the period 1170-1190¹¹⁴ – a period which comfortably includes anno 1177. The 9th century dating of *Culhwch ac Olwen* has been revised by Simon Rodway

who has now assigned it to the middle or end of the twelfth century,¹¹⁵ – again a period which includes anno 1177. The poem *The Spoils of Annwfn* in *The Book of Taliesin* also fits in with twelfth century dating,¹¹⁶ whilst *Taliesin's Golden Chair* has also been dated to the twelfth century.

Eleven of the fifty-six poems in *The Book of Taliesin* were dated by Professor Ifor Williams to as early as the sixth century, giving support to a theory that Taliesin was a 6th century poet. Yet, the Welsh paleographic expert and literary translator J. Gwenogvryn Evans has demolished this proposition. “That Taliesin flourished in the middle of (the 12th) century there can be no manner of doubt” he wrote.¹¹⁷ Evans formed the view that the poetry of *several* poets was in *The Book of Taliesin*, (as was the case also with the ‘cauldron’ of the chief of Annwfn). Dating Taliesin to the period 1105–1175, or thereabouts, of those who proposed that there was another Taliesin in the sixth century Evans asked “Where is the evidence for this ghost, this birth of fraud, this tattle of public platforms...?”¹¹⁸ Evidently sceptical of the popular Taliesin myths, Evans prophetically stated (1910): “*Sooner or later truth will out, and will be proclaimed on the housetops*”.

Sarah Higley has proposed that the poem *The Spoils of Annwfn* is about poetic as well as folkloric plunder.¹¹⁹ The present research supports that proposition, suggesting in addition that triads also may have been taken from Abbeygrey. Support for her view comes from the facts that (i) the composer of *The Spoils of Annwfn* was patently a *gaelic bard* who, prior to the raid on Abbeygrey, already had poetry in the seized manuscripts; (ii) to this day echoes of *The Battle of the Trees* remain embedded in the Regia Altera landscape; (iii) certain poems which have been attributed to Taliesin were evidently poems by poets very familiar with the topographical environs of Regia Altera, e.g. *Song Before the Sons of Llyr*;¹²⁰ (iv) the composer of *The Death-song of Aeddon Mór* disclosed that Aeddon came from the land of Gwydion, that is, from the environs of Regia Altera.¹²¹

The link is therefore forged between the seizure of manuscripts of poetry and legends from Abbeygrey and the Norman invasion of Ireland by Welshmen, begun in 1169, all in a period in which the ‘*chief of Annwfn*’ to whom the manuscripts belonged was Rory O’Conor, King of Connacht and High King of Ireland. The most likely person to have been available in Wales to narrate (or dictate ?) these stories to Welsh scribes making translations and adaptations in the period 1170-1190 was the abetting gaelic poet who

was led by “Arthur” into Abbeygrey. In these translations to Middle Welsh, whether from dictation or narration through Irish, the original Irish names of some people and places were evidently written phonetically, but deliberate ‘modification’ of the legends concealed their association with Connacht kings, probably intentionally. With the acquiescence of some powerful Welsh landowner some were embedded into the Welsh landscape by inserting names of Welsh places, etc., the probable aim being to enhance the principality of Wales.

Further to the foregoing, in 2007 John K. Bollard,¹²² lexicographer, author and translator of the Mabinogi (and described as “one of a tiny elite of world experts on the Mabinogi”), was also seemingly standing aloof from typical academic Welsh ‘group think’. Asserting that much work needs to be done to determine how these tales were conceived and perceived in the Middle Ages, he made the rather prophetic comment: “*I propose not only that there is no such thing as “The Mabinogion”, but that – until further notice – there may not even be a “collection” of medieval Welsh tales, at least not from a medieval perspective.*”¹²³ Legends which were taken *in a batch* from Ireland to Wales in 1177 and, after being geographically adapted, were written in Middle Welsh in the period 1170-1190 could never have been authentic legends told by medieval Welsh story-tellers. Contrary to the view of Sioned Davies and others, not a syllable of them could have been passed down through generations.¹²⁴ Bollard is proved correct.

Professor Ifor Williams was of the opinion that the tales are the creation of one particular author but Sioned Davies gives reasons to doubt this.¹²⁵ *Proinsias Mac Cana* suggested that the Welsh versions of the Mabinogi were written by a cleric,¹²⁶ in which case the finger primarily points to involvement by the Cistercians at Strata Florida Abbey,¹²⁷ a monastery founded in 1164 by Robert Fitzstephen who led the Norman invasion of Ireland, and which was in the patronage of his powerful first cousin Rhys ap Gruffydd since c.1166. Rhys ap Gruffydd, who titled himself ‘*Prince of Wales*’ or ‘*Prince of the Welsh*’, founded a Cistercian nunnery at Llanllyr. He was patron also of Whitland Abbey.¹²⁸ Clairvaux Abbey near Troyes in France was the mother house of Whitland Abbey¹²⁹ which in turn was the mother house of Strata Florida Abbey. There would have been frequent traffic between these Welsh Cistercians and Clairvaux, on which route Troyes was a probable resting place, possibly accounting for Cretien de

Troyes' *Conte de Graal*.¹³⁰ Giraldus Cambrensis was Gruffydd's 'first-cousin-once-removed' and a frequent visitor to Strata Florida Abbey. It is scarcely credible that such a notoriously curious man had not encountered the legends taken from Abbeygre. His 'he-goat' accusation against King Rory O'Connor strongly suggest that before 1187, and especially before his 1188 tour of Wales, he already knew where the legends had been seized.¹³¹ His proposals for enriching the principality of Wales were promoted after that tour. It was at Strata Florida Abbey too that the Welsh poet, Dafyd ap Gwilym later resided as he introduced his new style¹³² of Welsh poetry, possibly aided by poems taken from Abbeygre.

Possibly the Mabinogi legends had belonged to the *Uí Maine* at an early stage. In the former *Uí Maine* landscape in north-east Co. Galway hero/heroine names, a 'goat theme' and more strongly a 'pig theme' still survive in place-names and in local memory.¹³³

Section Two - Notes & References

- ¹ 'The Camelot Project – A Robbins Library Digital Project' at the University of Rochester; available online at (d.lib.rochester.edu/Camelot/text/preiddeu-annwn), accessed on 8.10.2016.
- ² Squire, Charles, *The Spoils of Annwfn*, online at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caer_Sidi
- ³ Deeming the poem *Preiddeu Annwn* to be about King Richard's crusading mission to Palestine and Caer Sidi to be the port of Joppa (Jaffa), J. Gwenogvryn Evans (1910) wrote a rather eulogistic description of the latter place; see *A Facsimile of the Book of Taliesin*, p. 106, online at (<https://archive.org/details/facsimiletextofb00evan>).
- ⁴ Ann/wf/yn = *an ubh ein*; Caer Sidi = *Cathair Sidbe*; De/fwy = *Dé bhuaidh*; Lleawch = *Seabbach*; Lleinawc = *Seimineach*; Pry/deri = *Primb-Deiridh*; Pwyll = *Poill*.
- ⁵ A specialist university academic has assured the present writer that this may be so, but that other exemplars are unknown. (One feels that perhaps they have not been eagerly sought).
- ⁶ The particular Religious Order is of no consequence.
- ⁷ Many examples of bronze-age cauldrons have been found in Ireland. The Lisdrumturk Cauldron, ornamented by repoussé dots and decorative lines of rivets, is an exceptional example of Late Bronze Age metal-working, and the magnificent Castlederg Bronze cauldron (700-600 BC) found in a bog in Castlederg, Co. Tyrone, is ornamented by rows of conical rivets. Both were probably used for boiling meat and probably had a ceremonial as well as a social significance. See 'Castlederg Bronze Cauldron' online at <http://100objects.ie/castledergbronze-cauldron/>
- ⁸ Thomas Stephens, *The Literature of the Kymry*, Longman's, 1876, p. 183. Online at (https://archive.org/stream/literatureofkymr00stepuoft/literatureofkymr00stepuoft_djvu.txt
- ⁹ Guest, Charlotte, *The Mabinogion...*, (London, 1877), p. 321.
- ¹⁰ John Matthews, *Taliesin – the last Celtic shaman*, (Rochester; 1991, 2002), p. 254.
- ¹¹ The poem is about a pre-historic fictional battle over a lapwing, a white deer and a dog, both of these animals being mentioned in the Mabinogi story of *Pwyll* whose red-eared dogs killed a deer which king Arawn was hunting 'in Glen Cuch'. The battle was caused when Amaethon, brother of Gwydion, stole these animals from Annwfn which was ruled by king Arawn. Gwydion, a magician, animated the trees and stones to fight in his army. The alder came first, but willows and quickens came late and the birch, though courageous was a long time organising himself. The main contestants included Bran and Arawn on one side and the magician Gwydion with his brother Amaethon and a lady named *Achren* or *Ochren* on the other.

On each side in *The Battle of the Trees* there was one unknown contestant. Bran was the unknown contestant in Arawn's war-band and Achren was the unknown contestant in Gwydion's war-band. Whosoever could name the unknown contestant on the other side their side would win the battle.

Bran's Wood (*Ros Broin*) previously referred to the present Aughrane Wood. The name *Ros Broin* (Bran's Wood) was officially dropped c.1700, being replaced by the name 'Hermitage', but it survived in legal documents such as Deeds. Hermitage nowadays

incorporates a section of the former Bran's Wood.

Following the submission of *Ui Maine* in 1585 many changes were made in local land names near Ballygar, particularly those names referring in any way to gaelic kingship. The *óenach* assembly site, earlier known as *Tír Uibhe* and identified in the present research as 'the land of Annwfn' also bore the compound name *Killnereagh & Agherahar*. This compound name was replaced by the name 'Aghran' or 'Aughrane', that is, it was replaced by the name of the lady contestant in *The Battle of the Trees* – Achren. In this manner the name-forms Achren and *Ochren* have survived in the landscape, but are nowadays written Aghrane or Aughrane.

¹² Save in e.g. Deeds.

¹³ Griffith, Patent Roll 13 James I, *Calendar of the Irish Patents Rolls of James I*, section V, p. 297.

¹⁴ Irish 'ch' (= Eng. 'k') in place-names usually became either 'g' or 'gh' when phonetically written in English. Thus, for example, *Cluain Acha Liag* has been recorded as Clonagaleg in the *Church Taxation List* for the Diocese of Elphin (1306) and *Acha Reathar* has been recorded as Agherahar in the *Book of Survey and Distribution* (1641).

¹⁵ Griffith, Patent Roll 16 James I, *Calendar of the Irish Patents Rolls of James I*.

¹⁶ Locally pronounced 'ock-rain' (spondee).

¹⁷ See 'Kaer Sidi and other Celtic Otherworld terms' in Patrick Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature*, pp. 53-78.

¹⁸ 'Caer Sidi' is explained in *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* as "a magic island in the ocean"

¹⁹ 'Historical Mapping – Ordnance Survey Ireland', ordnance survey 25-inch map, online at <https://www.osi.ie/products/professional-mapping/> accessed on 16.2.2018.

²⁰ The abbey and castle icons are somewhat enlarged, but are correctly positioned.

²¹ *Song before the sons of Llyr* online at www.maryjones.us/ctexts/t14.html; accessed on 29.6.2018

²² *Song before the Sons of Llyr*, lines -4, -3. The Ordnance Survey Ireland 25-inch map shows the well north of the abbey site, at coordinates X = 576738, Y = 756777. See Fig. 8.

²³ Line -5 in *Song before the Sons of Llyr. Book of Taliesin XIV*. Online at www.maryjones.us/ctexts/t14.html, accessed on 30.6.2018.

²⁴ Unaware of the poet's topography, Caer Sidi is explained in *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* as "a magic island in the ocean".

²⁵ The name *Béal Átha Ghártha* suggests that such a ford existed. It translates as 'the approach to the ford of the enclosure', and is the current official Irish name for Ballygar.

²⁶ 'Gwenrod' = 'blessed wheel'. See *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* online at (<http://welsh-dictionary.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html>), accessed on 26.02.2017. The only place in Welsh literature in which this word 'gwenrod' arises is in this poem, (i.e. it has only one attestation). An English translation by Nerys Ann Jones was published under the title *Marwysgafn Veilyr Brydytl Deathbed Poem?* in *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 47, (Summer 2004), 17-39, being accredited therein to the twelfth century poet Meilyr Brydydd – chief court-poet to Gruffudd ap Cynan. The question mark in the title can be explained by the fact that this title has no status, the poem being later called *Cadair Aur Taliesin*, by Patrick Sims-Williams in his *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature*, p. 73-74. Further, Sims-Williams has stated therein that this is *an anonymous poem*, hence

- the accreditation to Brydydd is also incorrect. A (late) 12th century date is highly probably correct. Sims-Williams, Patrick, *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature*, (New York, 2011). Note that Mellifont Abbey, founded in 1142 was the first Cistercian abbey in Ireland. Hence 'gwenrod' post-dates 1142 unless there had been a still earlier monastery at Abbeygrey whose monks, possibly, became Cistercian.
- ²⁷ Sims-Williams, Patrick, *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature*, p. 74.
- ²⁸ It would seem that some of the poetry in *The Book of Taliesin* – or perhaps the original manuscript of that book – was seized from Abbeygrey. The book's name *Llyfr Taliessin* was created in the 17th century by Edward Lhuyd. Elis Gruffydd deemed 'Taliesin' to mean 'radiant brow'. Taliesin's biography (available at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taliesin>) seems to be in accord in many respects with the life of St. Brendan the Navigator who spent many years in Wales and was otherwise known as 'Braonfind' or 'Fair Brow'. G. Beggan, 'The placename 'Elphin' and the book 'Taliesin', *Co. Roscommon Historical and Archaeological Society Journal*, Vol 13, (2016).
- ²⁹ *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 47, (Summer 2004), 17-39.
- ³⁰ The *Tuatha Dé Danann* are associated especially with this part of Connacht, having allegedly fought the great battle of Moytura near Cong.
- ³¹ It is such mythology that has given rise to the name *Sliabh na mBan bhFionn* on a mountain in Co. Tipperary – refuge of the Munster fairy women – and to 'Knocknashee' being the name of many hills in Ireland.
- ³² It can be deduced from O'Flaherty's *Ogygia*, transl. Hely, 2, p. 20 and Nollaig Ó'Muraíle *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies* 1, p. 218, §51.20, that this high ground was the homeland of the pre-historic kings of Connacht Conri Cas, Tinne and Achy Allat, all of whom allegedly sprang from the *Tuatha Taidbean*.
- ³³ This great western division of Ireland was first known by the name *Olnegmacht* "strangely corrupted", says the venerable Charles O'Connor, into *Nagnata* by Ptolemy". *A Chronological description of West or b-Iar Connaught written A.D. 1684 by Roderic O'Flaherty, Esq., author of "Ogygia"; edited from a MS in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, with notes and illustrations by James Hardiman, M.R.I.A.*, p.126.
- ³⁴ Professor Janet Burton, 'Who were the Cistercians?', online at (<http://www.monastic.wales.org/article/3>), accessed on 2.1.2017. 'Mount Mary' has superseded both the name *Sliabh Seana-thuath* and *Sliau-furri*, and 'Monasternallea' is an alternative name now for this abbey ground.
- ³⁵ One takes 'it' to refer to the bardic chair. One is mindful that Pryderi and Manawyddan were two of the seven survivors of the slaughter at *Caer Sidi* (*alias* Regia Altera) in the legend *Branwen daughter of Llyr*, and therefore they both should know *Caer Sidi* on that account.
- ³⁶ The words "Three utterances, around the fire, will he sing before it", in the poem *Song before the sons of Llyr* are suggestive of triads. Some scholars have suggested that these words may refer to three instruments being played, possibly musical. But 'utterance' typically has to do with human speech.
- ³⁷ *Sung* – if the Welsh word *trioedd* (triad) be taken as Irish *Tri-odb* (interpreted as a three-line song – such as a *Canon* or *Round*; Irish: *odb* – 'song', 'music'), then one would expect that triads would be sung rather than recited.

- ³⁸ The poet's observation that '*six thousand men stood upon the wall*' could not be a reference to the afore-mentioned Norman raid because it runs counter to the information that the strength of that raiding party was '*three fullnesses of Prydwen*'.
- ³⁹ Also known as "The Lord Rhys" and "Lord of Deheubarth".
- ⁴⁰ Robert Fitzstephen landed about 400 men at Bannow Bay in 1169 using three ships. Shortly afterwards his half-brother Maurice Fitzgerald landed about 140 men in two ships. A one-ship difference possibly accounted for much of this 260-men difference. There is no information as to how ship-capacity varied between the five ships nor is there any evidence that any of the ships was filled to capacity.
- ⁴¹ The present writer has been authoritatively assured that nothing in the literary structure of this poem debars it from being dated to c1177.
- ⁴² Wright, Thomas M.A., F.S.A., (ed.), *The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis*, (London 1894), p. 288.
- ⁴³ Leland, Thomas D.D., *The History of Ireland from the Invasion of Henry II, Vol 1, 1773*, (Reprinted by Brett Smith, Dublin, 1814), p. 121.
- ⁴⁴ Moore, Thomas, *The History of Ireland, Vol 2*, (London, 1837), p. 298.
- ⁴⁵ Wright, *The Historical Works* ..., p. 283.
- ⁴⁶ Moore, *The History of Ireland* , p. 311.
- ⁴⁷ *The Annals of Ulster* and *The Annals of the Four Masters* for 1177.
- ⁴⁸ Leland, *The History of Ireland from the Invasion ...*, p. 122.
- ⁴⁹ Leland makes clear (p. 122) that it was upon his arrival in Roscommon that De Cogan sent a message to Rory O'Connor to join him "upon his allegiance".
- ⁵⁰ *Annals of the Four Masters* for 1177.
- ⁵¹ Wright, *The Historical Works* ..., p. 283.
- ⁵² Moore, *The History of Ireland*, p. 298.
- ⁵³ Moore, *The History of Ireland* , p. 284.
- ⁵⁴ Leland, *The History of Ireland from the Invasion...*, p. 122.
- ⁵⁵ According to Leland (p. 122) the Irish were in the habit of depositing their provisions and greater valuables in churches for safety, especially during domestic quarrels.
- ⁵⁶ From Roscommon to the ford at Garrower is c12.5 km.
- ⁵⁷ Sarah Higley, *Preiddeu Annwn...*, p.5. Available online at (d.lib.rochester.edu/Camelot/text/preiddeu-annwn), accessed on 14/11/2016.
- ⁵⁸ Moore, *The History of Ireland*, Vol 1, p. 284.
- ⁵⁹ Moore, *The History of Ireland* , Vol 1, p. 284; Wright, *The Historical Works* ..., p. 283.
- ⁶⁰ De Cogan would have been obliged to ford the Suck at Garrower.
- ⁶¹ Overland travel in Connacht in medieval times would have been slow and hazardous.
- ⁶² From the stone fortress to the Shannon at Athlone is about 20 miles. The journey requires fording the Suck.
- ⁶³ Thomas Johnson Westropp, 'Archaeology of the Burren: Prehistoric Forts and Dolmens in North Clare, Part V', online at (www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/archaeology/arch-burren/part5_corofin_district_glencolumbcille.htm), accessed on 3.1.2017.
- ⁶⁴ One is aware that the 1204 Cistercian Abbey at Duiske, Graiguenamanagh, Co. Kilkenny, which was partially enclosed by a fosse, had a high fence along the outer edge of the rampart.

- ⁶⁵ One is aware that Duiske Abbey had its wine and beer houses.
- ⁶⁶ See John Watt, *The Church in Medieval Ireland*, (Dublin, 1972), p. 155.
- ⁶⁷ These letters, published in 1909 in Volume 8 of *The Calendar of Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland* relating to the years 1427-1447, are now accessible on the Internet. See BRITISH HISTORY ONLINE Lateran Regesta 352: 1436-1438 available at (<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-papal-registers/brit-ie/vol8/pp637-641>) accessed on 1.12.2015.
- ⁶⁸ The present name 'Mount Mary' is probably due to this Order of St. Mary of Mount Carmel.
- ⁶⁹ 'De/fwý' = Ir. *Dé bhuaidh* = 'of God of victory'. Regarding this name *The Meadows of God of Victory* one is mindful that the Cistercian monastery at Abbeyknockmoy is said to have been founded by Cathal Cruverg O'Conor c.1190 in fulfilment of a vow he made before going into a battle against the English, to the effect that if victory should be his he would build a monastery in thanksgiving. The Abbeygrey monastery name 'The Meadows of God of Victory' suggests that the abbey was built for some similar reason. Cathal O'Conor was a much younger step-brother of Rory O'Conor.
- ⁷⁰ In *The Arthurian Place Names of Wales* Scott Lloyd (2017) adverts to another poem in *The Book of Taliesin* which contains the words: "Delightful in Defwy, when he visits his people". The implication is that 'Defwy' was a place where people convened.
- ⁷¹ By the eleventh century manual labour had been squeezed out of the daily routine in Benedictine monasteries by the expansion of liturgy.
- ⁷² Two classes were housed in Cistercian abbeys – laybrothers and choir monks. They had separate dormitories, kitchens and refectories, with such rooms as the library and writing rooms being for activities in which laybrothers had no part.
- ⁷³ See 'The Reform of the Church in the Twelfth Century' in John Watt, *The Church in Medieval Ireland*, Gill and Macmillan, 1972, 1-27.
- ⁷⁴ In Connacht the reform of the Irish Church was bound up with the rise of the O'Conors.
- ⁷⁵ M.W. 'awr' (= 'hour') can also mean 'occasion' or "particular time" or "when".
- ⁷⁶ John Watt, *The Church in Medieval Ireland*, Gill and Macmillan, 1972, p. 33.
- ⁷⁷ One suspects that the allusion to four peaks was a poetic reference to four corners.
- ⁷⁸ As already pointed out, the abbey attack took place in February or March in 1177.
- ⁷⁹ Bog water is noticeably amber tinted.
- ⁸⁰ According to the O.S. *Name Book* for the Parish of Killian St. Brendan's was also known as Woodyly. The *Appendix to the Fourth Report of the Commissioners on the Nature and Extent of the Bogs in Ireland* (1814) has a brief account of a bog group called 'The Woodyly & Castle-Kelly Bogs'. These were a number of small bogs extending over 5,354 acres, connected by narrow stripes of low grassy bog.
- ⁸¹ In the legend *Branwen daughter of Llyr* a magic *cauldron* was used to resurrect the dead men of *Mat Sól Loc's* army.
- ⁸² The availability of sparkling wine at this fortress after the 'cauldron' of literature was seized would suggest that the place was being used to store provisions seized from the nearby abbey.
- ⁸³ Sarah Higley has drawn attention to the fact that in *Culhwch and Olwen* there are two mentions of 'Llenlleawc the Irishman' in the list of names Culhwch invokes. Taking Welsh

'll' to be Irish 's; Llenlleawc is *Sean-seabbach* meaning 'old hawk'. Sarah Higley, *Preiddeu Annwn*, p.6. Available online at (d.lib.rochester.edu/Camelot/text/preiddeu-annwn), accessed on 14/11/2016.

- ⁸⁴ The Welsh word *aryant* can mean 'silver' or 'silvery'.
- ⁸⁵ The *bó riabbach* or brindled cow is steeped in Irish history and has had many associations with old folk tales. For example, the brindled cow complained to the month of March about the harshness of the weather so the month of March borrowed eleven days from the month of April continuing the harsh weather and killing the brindled cow. These eleven days are known as *laethe bó riabhaigh* or 'the days that killed the old cow'.
- ⁸⁶ A member of the cattle-herd which is never content except when trespassing on prohibited pastures.
- ⁸⁷ The story originally had no name. Culhwch is mentioned towards the end of the story.
- ⁸⁸ Also spelled *Cul-phoc*. Both the 'bb' and 'ph' can be taken as slurred in Connacht pronunciation, giving a throaty 'h' sound.
- ⁸⁹ Evidently 'He-goat' was the name given to the boy.
- ⁹⁰ Ir. *uaill* means 'illustrious', 'proud', 'vain'. Note the typical Connacht slurring/silencing of 'bh-' in 'bhean' to get Ol/wen from *Uaill-bhean*.
- ⁹¹ In the lost original Irish version of the tale the boy *Cul-bhoc* was probably raised by a goat-herd but in the altered Middle Welsh version of the tale he was raised by a swine-herd. To accord with this, in Wales 'Culhwch' is presumed to mean 'piggery' or 'hiding place of the pig', but when analysed, 'Cul-hwch' translates as 'narrow sow' or 'bigotted pig' which can indicate femininity for a boy, and lacks contextual sense. Rachel Bromwich has stated that *Culhwch* is unknown in Welsh sources (Bromwich, *Trioedds...*, p. 316). No such word is listed in *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*. The word is Irish written phonetically, and hence so is 'Olwen', its suggested Welsh etymology as 'white footprint' being seemingly contrived to match a fanciful phrase in the altered Welsh version of the story. See also 'The Irish Elements in Culhwch and Olwen' in Patrick Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature*. One notes that this author investigated Leinster for the place Esgair Oervel in this legend, deeming that name to refer to a mouth. Given the context, Esgair Oervel is probably *Eiscir fhoir-mheill* – 'the esker of the great knoll/protuberance' (the character Medyr could, in a twinkling, shoot the wren through the two legs upon Esgair Oervel in Ireland). In north-east Co. Galway there are more than a dozen 'esker' placenames, and others in Co. Roscommon. Isker glastorin in Tiaquin Barony (at the heart of ancient *Ui Maine*), decrypted as *Eiscir Ghlas Tórainn* ('the crude boundary-esker') conveys the same notion of 'defective' esker formation as *Eiscir fhoir-mheill*. Both names contrast with *Eiscir Alainn* ('beautiful esker') – a northern boundary point of ancient *Ui Maine*, as also was *Siodh Neannta*. (i) see Griffith, Patent Roll 16 James 1, *Calendar of the Irish Patent Rolls of James I*, p. 371; (ii) 'foir' is generally pronounced 'fóir'; (see 'for' in Dinneen's Irish-English Dictionary).
- ⁹² See 'Of a Goat which had Intercourse with a Woman', Thomas Wright, *The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis*, Chapter XXIII, (H. G. Bohn, London) 1863.
- ⁹³ Giraldus De Barry had come to Ireland in 1185 and employed much of his time collecting materials for his *Topography of Ireland* and his *History of the Conquest of Ireland*.
- ⁹⁴ The historical novelist Edward Ruadh Butler is author of *Swordland* of which Robert

Fitzstephen is a central character. Butler states that when Robert Fitzstephen went into Co. Cork in the latter half of 1177 to take up lands that were granted to himself and De Cogan by King Henry II he was “*accompanied by many of the men who had been involved in his original invasion in 1169*”. Butler, Ruadh, ‘Robert Fitzstephen (c.1120-1183)’, online at (<http://www.normandescendants.org/robertfitzstephen/>), accessed on 30.11.2016.

- ⁹⁵ Rachel Bromwich associates this Gweir with the Gwair of Triad 52 of *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, pp. 146-147.
- ⁹⁶ Before them he sang bitterly (7). The preposition ‘before’ denotes ‘previous to’ or ‘ahead of’.
- ⁹⁷ The Welsh word *ebostol* (4) or ‘epistle’ keeps up the prayerful atmosphere in which the poem begins and ends.
- ⁹⁸ Pwyll arises in three and Pryderi arises in all four branches of the Mabinogi.
- ⁹⁹ The word ‘*our*’ is in sharp contrast with ‘*my*’ in line 13.
- ¹⁰⁰ The historian *Seathrún Céitinn* (c.1634) listed De Cogan’s uncle Robert Fitzstephen among five Normans notorious for plundering churches and clerics and for violent tyranny. *Seathrún Céitinn, Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, p. 359. The slaughter of priests and monks by early Norman invaders was a reason why some of them later founded monasteries in reparation for their brutal actions.
- ¹⁰¹ For some as yet unexplained reason, the Cistercians found it difficult to find a permanent home for themselves in Connacht, making three false starts. Boyle, founded in 1161, was the earliest that survived and endured. Abbeygrey may be deemed to be one of the three unsuccessful attempts.
- ¹⁰² When there, Milo De Cogan and his uncle Robert Fitzstephen were given land in ‘the kingdom of Cork’ (excluding Cork town) by King Henry. Thereafter, for the next five years this pair was pre-occupied in Munster, seizing this land from its gaelic owners. Milo De Cogan and Ralph Fitzstephen were slain in an affray in east Cork in 1182. Robert Fitzstephen died of grief 1183, having lost his mind.
- ¹⁰³ St. Patrick’s feast day is March 17th.
- ¹⁰⁴ At this time of year only the fords at Garrower and Athleague allowed passage across the River Suck.
- ¹⁰⁵ They were deemed by Kuno Meyer to have been transmitted by oral narration. See Ivor B. John, M.A., Fellow of the University of Wales, ‘The Mabinogion’, being No. 11 in a series of lectures delivered at Cambridge, July 1897, available at Section 30 in Charles W. Jones, *Popular Studies in Mythology, Romance and Folklore*, (London, 1899) online at (https://archive.org/stream/popularstudiesin00lond/popularstudiesin00lond_djvu.txt) accessed on 30.7.2015.
- ¹⁰⁶ Now at University College Cork.
- ¹⁰⁷ Evidently the legend *Culhwch and Olwen* has been the basis for the dating of many Welsh medieval texts, and its re-dating by Simon Rodway has knock-on implications for the dating of several other Welsh manuscripts.
- ¹⁰⁸ The conclusion reached by Patrick Sims-Williams that “there was very little traffic between Ireland and Wales, at least through the vernacular languages” is to be interpreted in the context of the transmission to Wales of *a batch of manuscripts* seized in one fell

- swoop from Abbeygregey.
- ¹⁰⁹ Quoted from John Carey, *Ireland and the Grail*, (Aberystwyth, Celtic Studies Publications, 2007), pp. 130-133, by Alfred K. Siewers in *Strange Beauty: Ecocritical Approaches to Early Medieval Landscape*, (New York, 2009), p. 55.
- ¹¹⁰ Patrick Sims-Williams further assertion that “Irish influence on medieval Welsh literature is slight” is to be interpreted in light of John Carey’s findings and those of the present writer. Sims-Williams, Patrick, *Irish Influence.....*
- ¹¹¹ In what seems a corroboration of this belief Scott Lloyd has interpreted the absence of allusions to the legends *The Dream of Rhonabwy* and *Culhwch and Olwen* in medieval Welsh poetry as an inference that only a very small literary group knew of them. Scott Lloyd, *The Arthurian Place Names of Wales*, University of Wales Press, 2017.
- ¹¹² These were reproduced by Aberystwyth academic R.G. Gruffydd (ed.) in 1973 in *Meistri’r Canrifoedd Ysgrifu Gan Saunders Lewis*. (Cardiff, 1973)
- ¹¹³ A historian, poet, dramatist and literary critic, Saunders Lewis in 1970 was a Nobel Prize nominee for literature and in 2005 was 10th in a BBC Wales poll to name Wales’s greatest-ever person.
- ¹¹⁴ Charles Edwards, Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, having judged the arguments put forward by historian Saunders Lewis to be “not sufficiently convincing”, argued lengthily for an earlier date but concluded this contribution to the literature by conceding: “I don’t think that any precise date for the Four Branches can yet be given”. Charles-Edwards, “The Date of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi’..
- ¹¹⁵ Rodway, Simon, ‘The date and authorship of Culhwch ac Olwen: a reassessment’, *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 49, pp. 21-44.
- ¹¹⁶ Higley, The Camelot Project, ‘Preiddeu Annwn: The Spoils of Annwn’, Footnotes, line 3, p. 4.
- ¹¹⁷ J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *A Facsimile of the Book of Taliesin*, p. iii.
- ¹¹⁸ J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *A Facsimile of the Book of Taliesin*, p. iii.
- ¹¹⁹ Higley, Sarah Lynn, ‘The Spoils of Annwn: Taliesin and Material Poetry’, in *A Celtic Florilegium: Studies in Memory of Brendan O’Hehir*, ed. Kathryn A. Klar, Eve E. Sweetser and Claire Thomas, Celtic Studies Publications 1996, 43-53.
- ¹²⁰ The poet could describe the land features of Abbeygregey, and stated that he had a chair in Caer Sidi (l. -9 to l. -1); he had been in *The Battle of the Trees* (l. 28) and with Bran in Ireland (*sic*) (l. 30), and he praised Elphin (l. 25). Though the poem is attributed to Taliesin, evidently it was composed by a gaelic poet.
- ¹²¹ ‘The Death-song of Aeddon Mor’, online at www.maryjones.us/ctexts/t45.html accessed on 30/6/2018.
- ¹²² Dept. of Celtic Languages and Literature, Harvard University.
- ¹²³ John K. Bollard, *Mabinogi and “Mabinogion”*, online at <https://sites.google.com/site/themabinogi/mabinogianandmabinogion>, accessed on 18.2.2018.
- ¹²⁴ Davies proposed: ‘(the stories)....evolved over centuries before reaching their final form: as such, they reflect a collaboration between oral and literary culture.’ Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, (Oxford 2007), ix.
- ¹²⁵ See Sioned Davies, *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, 13.

- ¹²⁶ Mac Cana, Proinsias (1958), *Branwen, Daughter of Llyr, A Study of the Irish Affinities and of the Composition of the 2nd Branch of the Mabinogi*, University of Wales Press, 182-183.
- ¹²⁷ See also Breeze, A. (1997), 'Did a woman write the "Four Branches of the Mabinogi"?', *Studi Medievali*, 3rd series, 38, pp. 690-691.
- ¹²⁸ Monastic Wales online at www.monasticwales.org/person/23, accessed 4.7.2018.
- ¹²⁹ Monastic Wales online at www.monasticwales.org/person/36, accessed 4.7.2018.
- ¹³⁰ John Carey has argued that a group of medieval Irish texts influenced surviving Welsh texts and the earliest French texts that mention the Grail, especially Cretien de Troyes' *Conte del Graal*. Cretien de Troyes flourished between 1165 and 1180, and died in 1191, fourteen years after the raid on Abbeygreig. Traffic between the Cistercians in Wales and their mother house in Clairvaux must have been common. The Mabinogi legends may have been conducted rapidly to France, and made known to Crétien De Troyes who then e.g. originated the character Lancelot. Troyes is on the route to Clairvaux from Wales through any one of the French ports: Nantes, Cherbourg or La Havre, and the two towns are only 42 miles apart. See John Carey, *Ireland and the Grail*. Chapter 20.
- ¹³¹ In 1188 Giraldus De Barry toured Wales with the Archbishop of Canterbury, possibly at that time selecting place-names in which to embed the tale *Mat son of Mathonwy*, etc., an enterprise which required the permission of a powerful temporal lord. He then produced a book: *Proposals for enriching the principality of Wales.....* The above date is significant in so far as it post-dated the raid on Abbeygreig in 1177 and the forceful seizure of Mabinogi legends which are now altered and embedded into the Welsh landscape.
- ¹³² One suspects his poetry was strongly influenced by seized Irish poetry. See 'Strata Florida (Abbey) – Monastic Wales', online at www.monasticwales.org/site/32.
- ¹³³ Relevant local townland names are: Aughrane (Ochren/Achren), *Ros Broin* (Bran's Wood), *Acha Muc* (Aghemuck: 'the pig field', now part of Aughrane), *Muc-anach* (Muckenagh: 'the pig-path' along the valley of the Suck, from Mount Talbot bridge downstream), *Muclann* (Mucklone: 'the piggery'), *Poll na Muice* (Pollnamucky: 'the hollow of the sow'). The bank of the River Suck, downstream from Mount Talbot bridge, is remembered as 'the valley of the pig.' A splendid well called 'Black Well' in Mount Talbot is remembered as 'Black Pig's Well'.

Section Three

The Cruffon¹ Trail

(Lines composed in the legendary
landscape of the Mabinogi)

Last golden sun-streaks shafted down
 on folds² and fields on Slefshankuogh;³
Spent day had robed in evening gown
 and homeward straggling ravens flew.
As lengthening shadows etched the vale
 where Suck meanders leisurely
I scanned the snaking stretch of trail
 'twixt me and sleep in Cloonagle.⁴

I doffed my trekking boots to sit
 and ease chafed feet in soothing stream,⁵
And slake a thirst with water sweet,
 and laze and ruminant, and dream
Of Cruffon paths I'd paced since morn,
 my stick and backpack as my aids,
My clacking heels my metronome
 to time birdsong in song-filled glades.

The sinking sun dipped low, then lower
 till darkness drained the dusky light,
And as I gazed my eyes glazed o'er –
 my senses lulled by falling night.
My mind its mortal mooring 'scaped,
 and sprightly sped through eons of time
To rendezvous with spectral shapes
 that ranged this ancient land sublime.

Section Three - The Cruffon Trail

Kings, abbots, bards and ladies fair,
 all quick and lively, charged my brain
Like phantom ghosts of yesteryear –
 all links in one unbroken chain
That stretched since time began till now –
 strong steadfast heroes of this soil
Who Cruffon tamed by spear and plough
 and vanquished fear by might and toil.

At morn I spied a rising purl⁶
 at Woodly⁷ grove near Doranstown⁸
Which, spurting up from *Underworld*,
 swift to a moorland brook⁹ jets down.
Here sweet *Guth Aoibhinn*¹⁰ dwelt, content
 to soothe sore feet of wizard *Mat*
While *Gil'-Fead Oidhe*¹¹ awhistling went,
 on love intent.¹² (Scant chance o' that!)

On farther bank in dappled shades
 a monument, in high relief,
In quietude veils infants' graves
 in umbo tomb¹³ of ancient chief
Whose studded mound¹⁴ of moulded clay
 with densest sedge is skirted round,
And *tóchar*¹⁵ of primeval day¹⁶
 leads to and from this hallowed ground.

To where this famed magician¹⁷ lurked
 within his maiden-watered¹⁸ fell,
And wily wizard wonders worked,
 came Brendan, bound to break his spell.
Here pilgrims plead Saint Brendan's aid
 while circling round the rushy spring;
To tally every prayer that's said:
 one pebble¹⁹ 'gainst each uttering.

Where strong fort²⁰ thrived in long lost time
no stone survives, or so 'twould seem;
But love resides where two brooks join²¹
to flow entwined, one singing stream.
Cathair Dá Tul gan trácht gan tuairisc,
Mat is an óigh-bhean fuar faoi'n chré
Dhá abhainn oidhe ó'n bhfásach ag bruailleadh
síos fána i gceiliúr go suanmhar araon.

On Shiven's flank by *Bearna Bwee*,²²
in irreparable decay,
An ancient gaelic nunnery
keeps mem'ry of a distant day
When womenfolk of saintly mind
remotely dwelt, entrusting all
To prayer and service to mankind,
in concord with Augustine's call.²³

This unpretentious chapel with
its narrow²⁴ archéd ashlar door
Was stone on stone upstanding in
the heydays of King *Cathal Mór*²⁵
Who Kilcreevanty Abbey²⁶ built,²⁷
the mother-house of this sad pile,
Festooned with ivy wreaths which tilt
in def'rence towards the sacred soil.

Here Canonesses Regular
sang canticles by rote as wont,
In this dim east-lit prayer-space with
its single window high up front,
Revealing that quite few could read;
(for books were few and rare – or none,
And such books they were wont to need
were slowly hand-writ, one by one.)

Section Three - The Cruffon Trail

These walls, which Pope Honorius
 from greed unseemly kept secure,²⁸
Lie prone, though some stand glorious,
 and flailing rains and winds endure.
So, still this wilful monument
 bedecking verdant side of Shiven
Stays stubborn gem²⁹ and testament
 to feisty staunch reforming³⁰ women.

The silken Shiven fondly 'flurts'
 'gainst arching stones at Ballin'more³¹
Where instant swift pie-powder courts³²
 fixed rows twixt merchant men of yore
On market days; that fair's gone long –
 its fame for old hens' sales³³ is all
That now lives on where fireside song
 and tales old memories recall.

Yet, now and then an angler sly,
 with rod and fly, will cast about
And homeward weave another 'why,
 and where and how' he lost a trout.
Forlorn loss; but long lost too
 the distant days of Cruffon's prime,
Now vanished like the morning dew
 or stifled 'neath the sands of time.

To Killeroran's³⁴ ridge I roved
 its ancient standing stone to view³⁵
Where *Flaithbri*, Connaught's king of old,
 the clansmen of Hy Many slew.³⁶
Cast out from Cruffon land, they went
 and spent six hundred years and more
In restlessness and discontent
 in exile south of Shiven's shore,³⁷
Still yearning for their old birth-right
 by memory and hope sustained
'Till William *Buí* O'Kelly's³⁸ might
 their cradle-lands again³⁹ regained.

Here silver-guagéd ground was given⁴⁰
 by *Cairbre Crom* to *Ciarán*
Whose spirit work, with Light from Heaven,
 changed pagan⁴¹ night to Christian dawn.
When time ticked on till clashing creeds
 sowed sordid seeds, snide strife to yield
Both *Cill ar Rinn*⁴² and *Cill Liatháin*⁴³
 by Deed of John⁴⁴ had faith fate sealed.

Anon Red Hugh O'Donnell's hand,
 in dour disdain for England's sword
A *Taoiseach* made of Ferdinand⁴⁵ –
 Hy Many's last O'Kelly Lord,
Instated chief midst war and chaos.⁴⁶
 The slogan of O'Kelly clans:
"Turrís Fortis Mihi Deus"⁴⁷
 o'er humble headstones towering stands.⁴⁸

Section Three - The Cruffon Trail

Ba bhuacach *Tuatha Taoidhean*⁴⁹ tráth 'nseo,
ba shualach lúth a bhfir i dtáinte
Ba mhúinte draoithe, saoithe 's báird ann
ba chumhrach nuachair, naoidhin is mná aca.
Níorb leasc le h-uaisle 's táire⁵⁰ tíocht
chuig rígte fhlaith⁵¹ ar Chluain Ach' Liag
Ó Dhoire Thuath-bó⁵² is ó'n Lathach Ghlas
chruinnigh cách d'fhonn rígte Chonrí Chais.⁵³

The doughty days of *Cill Na Rí*⁵⁴
with awe and wonder stirred my soul;
This tomb⁵⁵ was regal destiny⁵⁶
of fallen chiefs of *Seinchineoil*;⁵⁷
Here *óenach*⁵⁸ games ennobled death,
and grief with cheery glee concealed⁵⁹
As crowds profane, with raucous breath,
urged horsemen round the Racing Field.⁶⁰

Here kith and kin from near and far –
riders, pipers, poets, gleemen –
Amassed as one⁶¹ at Beallaghar⁶² –
ladies, chieftains, felons,⁶³ freemen.
Shrieks and clamour filled the air
and champions flaunted skilful grace;
Merchants bartered foods and ware
and lowing oxen filled the place.

Musicians played on dulcet strings
and minstrels retold Fianna tales;
Women wove embroiderings
or long-dead queens and kings bewailed.⁶⁴
High-seated on *Ubh Éin*,⁶⁵ the king⁶⁶
outlawed misdeeds⁶⁷ and civic strife,
Re-shaping rules⁶⁸ and minist'ring
to foster peace and prosp'rous life.

Here *Poill*⁶⁹ swapped shape and place with *Aedh*.⁷⁰
 Their paths crossed hunting in the glen⁷¹—
*Aedh Rán*⁷² upon his dappled grey,
 the most illustrious of men.
The beauty *Ríoghan Án*⁷³ rode by;
 pursued by *Poill*, she wasn't caught;
She glimpsed the twinkle in his eye;
 next day they lovingly pledged troth.

Here too the animated wood
 for the magician⁷⁴ strode to fight;
The alder, oak and willow stood
 as man with man, opposing might
Of Bran and Aedh; blue-bells combined⁷⁵
 and charmed elms slew all round.⁷⁶
Broom, holly, fern for fray aligned.
 The cause? A stolen buck and hound!
The combat raged; but none could say
 what was the lady Aughran's name,
Whilst Bran's was guessed; she won the day.
 Bran's Wood a legend site became.

At Clonmelega's⁷⁷ "well" I mused
 where soil strewn thin o'er slabrock⁷⁸ hides
A gnomon platform,⁷⁹ long disused,
 its post-hole⁸⁰ peering to the skies.
A sun-clock on this platform stood,
 its shadows timing passing day
And aiding guage of latitude⁸¹
 – their guide, lest sailors sail astray.⁸²

Section Three - The Cruffon Trail

When levels of the lake nearby⁸³
 in rainy spells rise high in flood
Its waters pool above the 'eye'
 and slab whereon this gnomon stood.
Reflections of the night-sky stars
 in motion gem-like through these pools
Were detailed by astronomers
 who knew them as '*Clock of the Jewels*'.⁸⁴

Right here on *Slefsbankuogh* was found⁸⁵
 a *sign of Cross*⁸⁶ by peasantry
Who, sensing this was holy ground,
 devoutly built an orat'ry.⁸⁷
Then later Donald's⁸⁸ sage decree
 to Carmelites gave this 'roode land'⁸⁹
To build themselves a monast'ry⁹⁰
 by sweat of brow and craft of hand.

Here grey-clad monks⁹¹ grew orchard trees,
 bent low with cherry, plum and pear⁹²
And nect'ry blooms lured honeybees⁹³
 when sweet aromas filled the air.
Their deft hands steered the swishing shears
 that silv'ry tiers of fleece begat,
And myrtles⁹⁴ pulled to hue the wool
 or flavour full their beer-brimmed vat.

The scythe swings through their meads no more
no stooping monk the sickle wields,
For mouldering at yon grave-yard's core
lie bones of those who tilled these fields.
On loam which golden corn grew
contented herds in uplands lie,
Or furze or fern sprouts anew,
espied by ragworth's golden eye.
In fantasy their bell-tower stands
and jangling bell clangs out the chimes
And calls to prayer, at which commands
their God they laud in Latin rhymes.

In Middle Welsh⁹⁵ a tale⁹⁶ is told
of *Inis Ealga's*⁹⁷ king '*Mallolwch*' –
A name which none could e'er unfold
(on ear it sounds quite like 'match-owe-luk')
Though written strange in foreign slang⁹⁸
this name can be deciphered pat
'*Mallolwch*' is *Mat Sól Loc*⁹⁹ and
the name means 'Sun-arena *Mat*'.
Distinctive of an Irishman?¹⁰⁰
Of course! (Good Lord! He's just like me –
Best ships!¹⁰¹ Big house!¹⁰² Rich wife! Much land!
and tops at maths and 'stronomy!).

Mat Sól Loc was *Mat eolach*¹⁰³ too
and kept the finest fleet at hand.
He sailed to Wales a maid to woo,
(the sister, Branwen, of King Bran).
Unhappy in her new-won home
a tearful tale was sent by note
To Bran who set upon the foam
the greatest fleet e'er seen afloat.
In murderous mood and seeking gore,
Bran steered his ships to Erin's shore.

Section Three - The Cruffon Trail

To *Llinon*¹⁰⁴ westward sagely raced
 Mat Sól Loc (by Bran's army chased!)
To put the Shannon's broad expanse
 twixt him and Bran's unchecked advance.
Mat Sól Loc tore down Shannon's bridge;
 once home a fight killed almost all;
Bran lies interred near Hermitage;
 his head his men took home, in pall.¹⁰⁵

Mat Sól Loc fell with all his men;
 his magic 'Cauldron of Rebirth'
All shattered lay; then woe and pain
 bore distraught Branwen from this earth.
At London Tower now ravens nest
 and soar o'er heads round London Town
For 'Bran' means 'raven' (as you've guessed);
 each rook the ghoul of Bran, *sans* crown.

[She '*Llinon* ought be *Lliuon*' wrote!
 Alas! Alack! To no avail;
Mathonwy¹⁰⁶ and *Mat Sól Loc*, both,
 shout "Nay!", "Nay!!" from the Cruffon trail.
"Caer Dathyl stands near Ballygar;
 Mat's star-clock too is well in range;
Annwyn is not very far –
 in fact it basks at Castlestrange."]

Sincerest souls have said since yore
 Saint Patrick to Mat's sun-place came;
A stone ('tis told) his knee-print bore¹⁰⁷
 is gone; a shrine promotes his name.
Where pagan people worshipped sun
 and stars (in circling sky o'erhead),
To pray repentant pilgrims come,
 imploping pity, peace, instead.

To Slefshankuogh on wintry gales
ride tearful tales of groaning grief
As seven steadfast sons of Wales
bore back the brave head of their chief.
Six thousand men stood on these walls
whilst Mat and Bran the goblets supped
Till treachery the feasting stalls –
from slaughter *only seven rose up*.

Pryderi's umbo tomb is found
precisely where the tale foretold;
It rests on high¹⁰⁸ in Erin's ground¹⁰⁹
above *Gearr Ór* – the ford of old.
Below it wends *An Dubh-abhann Bhreá*¹¹⁰
unmindful of the battlefield
Where Mat's war-band in *Cluain Dá Ráth*
compelled Pryderi's men to yield.

Short peace at *Neannta Caill*¹¹¹ was gained;
then, nigh the ford all came to cross
The footmen quarrelled unrestrained
and both bands faced yet further loss.
That no more men for pigs should die
Pryderi for a duel pled;
For swine purloined by wizardry
he, too, near *Cluain a' Ghliath* fell dead.

At Slefshankuogh I'd mused for long,
like Mat 'neath turning gem-rich skies;
Guth Aoibhinn crooned an eerie song
of Aeddon's death. Hark! Ho! Who cries?
Pryderi calls from out his mound:
"Both tales and poems by monks were wrote
On hides of goat, and pearly bound!
Yon horde transmitted all by boat!"

Section Three - The Cruffon Trail

Lo! Horror-sight my vision blurs
as mail-clad 'Arthur'¹¹² and his mob
At Slefshankuogh like wolves and curs,
again sack altars, loot and rob.
From flashing sword of *Seabhach*¹¹³ monks strain,
and all about sheer bedlam reigns,
And gore of gentle learned men
flows red and warm from their veins.

Then *Seimineach*,¹¹⁴ with eyes aglow,
the 'Spoils'¹¹⁵ grasps tight in grip of steel,
And wine of elder, pear and sloe
is carried from the 'heavenly wheel'.¹¹⁶
All retreat and southwest go
to quaff, and revel in their luck
On isle¹¹⁷ where jet-stained waters flow,¹¹⁸
and there read from the stolen book
Some verses by the gaelic poet
who helped – then 'sang'! From him we know it!

Let *God's Meadows of Victory*¹¹⁹
re-echo throughout Cruffon's plains
That "*Truth Will Out*, though history
by Norman guile is page-wise¹²⁰ stained!"
While throughout Wales in academe
to youth *our* poems and tales are told
Let's clink and toast with eyes agleam:
"To 'blessed wheel' and 'chair of gold'!!"

Through Ochren's Wood a slow bell tolls
in mourning for Taliesin's fame;
To *Fodbla's* bards repute is owed
for odes promoted in his name.
Soft murmurings fill *Cathair Sidhe*
where head-bowed monks in capes of grey
Remember *Arthur's* "gallantry"
and low the *De Profundis* say.

Notes & References – Section Three

- ¹ This was the ancient expanse of land in N.E. Co. Galway which stretched from Caltra to Creggs and from Achiart to the River Suck. It is thought to have taken its name from *Creamhan Caol*, a grandson of Maine Mór from whom allegedly came the Uí Maine in the 4th century. Regia Altera lay within this region.
- ² Sheep-farming is a traditional pursuit in this part of east Co. Galway.
- ³ Slefshankuogh: one of a number of anglicised name-forms of *Sliabh Seana-thuath*; it refers to that expanse of high ground which included present Mount Mary, Slievemurry, Abbeygrey, etc.
- ⁴ Ir.: *Cluain a' ghliadb* – the ‘cloon of battle/tumult’ (*alias* ‘Clooningly’, etc.). This is the Co. Roscommon townland entered from Co. Galway by crossing the bridge at Mount Talbot. The name is due to the noisy battles which took place at the critically important ford of Garrower, upriver from Mount Talbot bridge and about 2 miles from the pre-historic royal seat *Regia Altera*. Testimonies to ancient fights are a stone axe-head and a bronze sword found in the River Suck near the present bridge. (Ir. *gleo*, gen. case *gliadb* and *gleo*; Eng.: tumult, battle.)
- ⁵ The reference is to the river which rises near Abbeygrey and flows through Castlekelly/Aughrane.
- ⁶ This short rill or rivulet spurts from the ‘Underworld’ beside St. Brendan’s Well.
- ⁷ In the 19th century this locality was known as Woodly.
- ⁸ Actually, it is in adjacent St. Brendan’s townland. This townland, close to the town of Ballygar in Co. Galway, was known in Irish as *Creagán an Ghruagaigh*, meaning ‘the rocky place of the magician’. The present composer has identified this as the place called Caer Dathyl in the Welsh tale of the magician *Math fab Mathonwy* – one of the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*.
- ⁹ The upper stretch of the Cloonlion river. Dr. Petty’s map shows that there was a small island on the river.
- ¹⁰ ‘Goewin’ in Middle Welsh was a beautiful maiden who was Mat’s foot-holder in the tale *Math son of Mathonwy*. She lived with Mat constantly at Caer Dathyl. Go/e-win decodes as *Guth Aoibhinn*. *Guth* – a voice; *aoibhinn* – sweet/pleasant; (*‘bb’* is silent).
- ¹¹ ‘Gilfaethwy’ in Middle Welsh was a nephew of *Mat*. The name is taken to be a phonetic composite: *gile*: (a term of endearment); *fead*: a whistle sound; *oidhe*: of song/music. (Ir. *odh*: music/song).
- ¹² Gilfaethwy was in love with *Guth Aoibhinn*, but Mat’s perpetual presence was a frustration.
- ¹³ The peak of this umbo or mound grave is about 4 feet above the surrounding ‘level’ ground.
- ¹⁴ Rough stones stud the mound, each marking an infant’s grave.
- ¹⁵ The ancient *tóchar* which gives access to this monument is raised several feet above the level of the surrounding ground; it has a dyke along one side and a river along the other, making access to the *tóchar* along its length nigh impossible.
- ¹⁶ A *tóchar* in Corlea Bog, Co. Longford, has been dated to 148 B.C. Another, in Killaderry bog a few miles south-east of Ballinamore Bridge, has been dated to the Bronze Age.

- ¹⁷ In reality, the title ‘magician’ usually meant that the person so described could do extraordinary things.
- ¹⁸ Gushing directly from underground, this short rill can be regarded as ‘maiden’ or ‘virgin’ water, unpolluted, even sacred. It is deemed to have healing properties and until recent decades the well has been a place of yearly pilgrimage. Two preserved parallel ‘ridges’ on the ground, scarcely noticeable unless the grass is cut, suggest that there was some as yet unexcavated ancient structure here.
- ¹⁹ Research has shown that pilgrims at this and at other wells dedicated to St. Brendan were wont to throw a quartz pebble in the well to number each prayerful activities. At this particular well quartz pebbles were used, but some pilgrims used rushes instead, which they plucked near the well.
- ²⁰ The site was called the ‘isle of the strong door’ in the Welsh poem *Preiddeu Annwn*.
- ²¹ The reference is to the short rill which rises beside the well and immediately joins the Cloonlion River
- ²² *Bearna Bui*: ‘the yellow gap’. It is shown on the Google map as ‘Barnaboy’ on the R363, but the name now is locally forgotten. The gap itself is revealed on the 1841 O.S. I. map at the nunnery bend on what then was the main road. It now is closed. A new section of road eliminating the bend was put through the Killian animal pound which in c.1840 was part of the old nunnery grounds.
- ²³ The nunnery was known as ‘St. Mary Kyllin’. The Kyllin nuns were *Canonesses Regular of the Order of St. Augustine of the Arrouaisian Congregation*.
- ²⁴ This doorway, measuring only 2 feet 11 inches wide, is narrow and rather low for a church door.
- ²⁵ *Cathal Mór* O’Connor (1153-1224) was king of Connacht.
- ²⁶ Located on the banks of the Dalgin River near Tuam, this was the mother-house of at least ten medieval gaelic nunneries in Connaught, all called ‘St.Mary’.
- ²⁷ Gerard Beggan, ‘A legacy of the munificence of Cathal Crubh-Dearg O’Conor towards the Irish church: a women’s story forgotten’, Joseph Mannion and Katharine Simms (ed.s), *Politics Kingship and Culture in gaelic Ireland c.1100-c.1690 – Essays for the Irish Chiefs’ and Clans’ Prize in History*, 86-98, (Wordwell, 2018).
- ²⁸ Because of frequent avaricious and expensive visits to Kilcreevanty Abbey by William de Birmingham, Archbishop of Tuam, sometimes accompanied by other gentlemen, its Abbess Orla complained to Rome. On one single visit de Birmingham removed goods to the value of £100. In response, Pope Honorius III put Killcreevanty Abbey and its daughter houses under the protection of himself and St. Peter.
- ²⁹ Such a ruined nunnery is almost unique; medieval gaelic nunneries have *very rarely* escaped *total* demolition.
- ³⁰ These nuns were women *reformers* of the ailing medieval Irish Church.
- ³¹ There was a ford on the River Shiven here in ancient times.
- ³² A pie-powder court was a special on-the-spot court which sat at public markets and fairs in medieval times to settle trading disputes. By *Patent Roll 10 James 1* Colla O’Kelly, Lord of the Manor of Skryne, was authorised to hold a regular market and pie-powder court at Ballinamore.
- ³³ As time went on the fair at Ballinamore declined. By the mid nineteenth century it was

little more than a hen market.

- ³⁴ The historic name of this townland was *Cluain Acha Liag* – ‘the watershed of the field/land of the standing stones’. A standing stone is missing and one is extant.
- ³⁵ The broken standing stone is in that part of Killeroran called ‘Ruane’. Local lore relates that a bishop lies beneath it.
- ³⁶ Called *The Battle of Acha Liag*, 775 A.D. The Hy Many chief was *Donncha Ua Daimbine*. *Seathrún Céitinn’s* account of the battle says the bishops of Kilmore and of Ardbracken died there. The extant standing stone pre-dated both of these, having been in existence when *Cairbre Crom* was chief of all *Uí Maine* (Hy Many) in St. Kieran’s lifetime. Kieran (516 A.D.–546 A.D.), hailed from Fuerty.
- ³⁷ More precisely, they had already been restrained south of Ahascragh since c.600 A.D.
- ³⁸ The Kellys of Castlekelly and Cloonlion were descended from this William *Buí* O’Kelly.
- ³⁹ Circa 1340.
- ⁴⁰ *The Registry of Clonmacnoise* reveals that land here to the value of 3 oz. of silver and 5d. was given by *Cairbre Crom*, Chief of all Hy Many or *Uí Maine*, to St. Kieran, founder of Clonmacnoise monastery.
- ⁴¹ Not only was sun worship rife in Ireland at the coming of St. Patrick but other pagan practices persisted, e.g. at inauguration of early pagan kings. The late P.E. Egan has put on written record, and his late brother John has confirmed to the present writer that all the fields of their father’s farm are littered with horses’ teeth, seen only when the land is under tillage. A connection between pagan royal inaugurations and horse sacrifice is suspected.
- ⁴² This is the final name by which the ruined church in Killeroran was known. A Fr. John Mac Giolla Rua served there in 1492, followed by a Fr. Donal O’Kelly.
- ⁴³ A Fr. Magonius MacAban served Killian vicarage c.1460. A Fr. John O’Dougan O.S.B. was serving in Killian in 1492. He was a monk in the Benedictine monastery of the Apostles Peter and Paul de Innocentia, situated near Athlone, on the west side. This monastery, long ago extinguished, was the only off-shoot in Ireland of the great Benedictine monastery of Cluny in France. Monks from it commonly served several local parishes. The vicarage of Killian had been vacant for a very long time. Killian and Killernaland (i.e. *Cill ar Malann*, now Killeroran) became united under a Canon O’Kelly at this time – a least for a spell. A Fr. Cornelius O’Kelly who, despite being only 21 years old or thereabouts, nonetheless held the rank of Canon in the diocese of Tuam, was assigned to Ballynakylleachyarta (i.e. *Baile na Cille Achaidh Fhearta* – now known simply as ‘Achiart’) by the bishop of Tuam on the resignation of its previous vicar, Fr. Odo Ythnay.
- ⁴⁴ In 1605, to dispose of the suppressed Catholic churches there, John Lynch, the incumbent Anglican bishop of Elphin, by Deed dated 9 August of that year, for a certain sum of money and with agreement of Edward Kinge, dean of Elphin (and next to become bishop there), and of his whole Chapter, demised several churches in the diocese of Elphin to Henry Lynch of Galway – viz. 21 churches in Co. Roscommon, 10 churches in Co. Sligo and 8 churches in Co. Galway – to hold for 99 years. These Galway churches included both Killian – recorded in the Deed as ‘Cillian’, and ‘Cilleren’ (‘Cilleren’ is *Cill ar Rinn* – the name by which the medieval church standing on the headland or promontory in the townland later renamed ‘Killroran’ had come to be known.)

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- In 1611 John Lynch, having as Anglican bishop greatly impoverished Elphin diocese, resigned from that position, declaring himself to be a Roman Catholic.
- ⁴⁵ Red Hugh O'Donnell inaugurated Ferdinand O'Kelly of Aughrim as Chief of Hy Many in Dec. 1595 at the start of the *Nine Years War*. The original name of Killeroran – i.e. *Cluain Acha Liag* ('the watershed of the land of the standing stones') – was then changed to 'Killro rea'. [*Cill rua ri* – 'the ruddy (i.e. wooden) church of the chiefs' – that name being a reference to the improvised ceremonial church used. The chiefs were O'Donnell and O'Kelly.] A surviving local legend recounts that a wooden church was brought by locals to the present ruined stone church which stands on the *promontory* (Ir.: *rinn*), and was left there. Hence the name *Cill rua ar rinn* yielding 'Killroran' and *Paráiste Cille rua ar rinn* yielding 'Parish of Killeroran'.
- ⁴⁶ Remnants of this ancestral inauguration mound remain, shown as Site 41 on the O.S. *Sites and Monuments* map.
- ⁴⁷ Trans.: "God for me is a strong tower".
- ⁴⁸ In Killeroran graveyard.
- ⁴⁹ Ancient septa who occupied almost a third of Connacht and some of whose kings came from the Mount Mary region.
- ⁵⁰ *Táire*: The lower classes.
- ⁵¹ The inauguration feast was known as the *bainis ri*. A place in Castlekelly is known as *Doire na bhFleadh* – the 'oakwood of the banquets'.
- ⁵² The townlands of Derryhippo and Lahagglass in Ballymoe Barony.
- ⁵³ Conrí Cas and his son Tinne were pre-historic kings of Connacht who sprang from the tribes of Mount Mary.
- ⁵⁴ *Cill na Rí* means 'the cemetery of the kings'.
- ⁵⁵ There is a barrow grave in Castlekelly.
- ⁵⁶ Early gaelic kings were wont to reside near an ancient tribal cemetery.
- ⁵⁷ The name *Seinchineoil* means *Old Kindred* or *Old Tribes* (Ir.: *sean-chineáil*) and is a reference to the archaic pre-goidelic people of this territory. The name also refers to the territory these tribes occupied.
- ⁵⁸ In ancient Ireland the *óenach* was a politico-religious assembly of all the people of his kingdom (which possibly was a whole province) called regularly by the king, for transacting public business, for market purposes, for athletics and other contests, particularly horse-racing. It lasted several days. The description given here is reasonably authentic.
- ⁵⁹ In the pre-Christian era a royal burial was accompanied by funereal games; but *óenach* assemblies and games continued well into the Christian era.
- ⁶⁰ Until c.1630 the Irish name of this field was '*Acha Reathar*' (Lit.: 'the field of the wild runs'). This name was subsequently supplanted by 'Aughrane' – the very ancient name of a mythological lady called Achren or Ochren in Welsh sources.
- ⁶¹ The word '*óenach*' derives from 'óen' meaning 'one' ('aon' in modern Irish) and has a primary meaning of "coming together" – i.e. a "re-union" *for the purpose of burial at a traditional tribal burial ground*.
- ⁶² This name-form arises in an Elizabethan *fiant* of 1585.
- ⁶³ Curiously, no criminal who attended an *óenach* could be arrested while there. It was a

place of refuge for all throughout the event – even for criminals.

- ⁶⁴ Traditionally the *óenach* fair and games were held at the site of an ancient tribal cemetery. The *óenach* games were a legacy from ancient funeral games honouring the *Otherworld*.
- ⁶⁵ The egg-like Castlestrange La Tène stone was at this *óenach* site.
- ⁶⁶ The two main functions of the gaelic king were (a) presiding over the *óenach* and (b) leading his people in battle.
- ⁶⁷ No quarrelling, misconduct, violence, hostility, suing, levying of debts, satirising, elopement, etc. were tolerated or dared during the event, under pain of most severe punishment, involving total ostracisation.
- ⁶⁸ The *óenach* was an occasion for dealing publicly with community business, for reviewing old laws and for promulgating new ones. The power of the king was held in check by the vote of the *óenach* and the people assembled at the *óenach* had the power to depose their king.
- ⁶⁹ The reference is to the Mabinogi legend *Pwyll*.
- ⁷⁰ Arawn in Middle Welsh, i.e. *Aedh Rán* meaning ‘Noble Aedh’.
- ⁷¹ In Glen Cuch in the Middle Welsh version of the legend.
- ⁷² Arawn, king of the land of Annwfn.
- ⁷³ Rhiannon phonetically in Middle Welsh.
- ⁷⁴ In this *Battle of the Trees*, also called *The Battle of Achren*, the magician Gwydion animated the trees, etc., to fight on the side of himself and his brother, together with a lady named Achren (*alias* Ochren, Aughran).
- ⁷⁵ Blue-bells still make a magnificent show in this ancient woodland, formerly known as Bran’s Wood.
- ⁷⁶ According to the poem *Cad Gaddeu* the elms fought at centre, flanks and rear.
- ⁷⁷ The reference is to Cluain Patrick in Athleague Parish. Clonmelega: Ir. *Cluain Maoil Lige* – ‘the cloon of the bare slabrock’.
- ⁷⁸ When the people of Athleague Parish took over this site c.1927 they covered the slabrock with a thin layer of bog-soil.
- ⁷⁹ This research has identified this as the site of an ancient gnomon, and stellar observatory.
- ⁸⁰ This is a hole gouged with iron in the slabrock, and taken locally to be a holy well. It usually is dry.
- ⁸¹ To do this required that thousands of shadow-length readings be taken throughout the year for a number of years.
- ⁸² Because calculation of longitude at sea was difficult in ancient times, sailors depended greatly on sailing along lines of known latitude. According to the tale *Branwen daughter of Llyr*, *Mat Sól Loc*, king of Ireland, had a magnificent fleet.
- ⁸³ This lake is a *turlough* and so is seasonal. A new drainage trench from it to the River Suck now reduces the frequency of overflow.
- ⁸⁴ Ir.: *Clog na Séad* – a name on land near the slabrock in 1641. It is being gradually corrupted, being spelled Cloghnashade in the 1841 O.S. map.
- ⁸⁵ Circa 1370 A.D.
- ⁸⁶ This *sign of the Cross* was the cruciform remnant of the church of an earlier monastery in Abbeygrey.
- ⁸⁷ However, they provided no money to maintain it.

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- ⁸⁸ Lord of Cruffon.
- ⁸⁹ The land in which the *sign of the Cross* was found was known as ‘*the roode land*’. In extent it was ½qr. (= 50 acres min.)
- ⁹⁰ Known formerly as Holy Cross, Sleushankuogh; now known as Abbeygrey. See Gerard Beggan, ‘The Carmelite House of Holy Cross, Sleushancogh, Diocese of Elphin’, *Co. Roscommon Historical and Archaeological Society Journal*, Vol 13, 2016, pp. 111-115. The site, about 8½ acres overall, is enclosed by a fosse 25 feet wide and ramparts 25 feet wide – the latter wide enough to give standing space to 6,000 men.
- ⁹¹ The evidence points to a medieval Cistercian monastery on this site, and the Irish name *Mainistir na Liath* (‘the abbey of the greys’) seems to have been due to these monks.
- ⁹² Cherry-trees and pear-trees are mentioned in *The Battle of the Trees*.
- ⁹³ It is evident from the poem *The Spoils of Annwfn* that the monks at Abbeygrey made mead from honey.
- ⁹⁴ i.e. bog-myrtle.
- ⁹⁵ That is, 12th and 13th century Welsh – the era in which the Mabinogion tales are deemed to have been written down in Welsh from oral transmission.
- ⁹⁶ *Branwen ferch Llyr* (i.e. Branwen daughter of Llyr).
- ⁹⁷ *Inis Ealga*: one of the earliest names for Ireland.
- ⁹⁸ i.e. in Middle Welsh.
- ⁹⁹ Latin: sol = sun, sunlight; locus = place, position.
- ¹⁰⁰ Rachel Bromwich (Cambridge University) has suggested that ‘Mallolwch’ – a name which she could not explain, was a **typical name** for an Irishman.
- ¹⁰¹ The splendour of his 13 ships on arrival to ask for the hand of Branwen, described as being in condition so perfect as never before seen, with banners bold, seemly and beautiful.
- ¹⁰² *Mat Sól Loc* feasted Bran and his men in his enormous mansion at Regia Altera, now called Abbeygrey.
- ¹⁰³ Ir.: *eolach* – learned, skilled, scientific.
- ¹⁰⁴ This name in the MSS has been taken by most scholars to refer to the Shannon, but others have argued unconvincingly that it referred to the Liffey.
- ¹⁰⁵ According to legend, Bran’s head was brought back to Wales.
- ¹⁰⁶ The word ‘*Mathonwy*’ is taken as Irish written phonetically (i.e. Math/on/wy). It decodes readily as either *Mat abhann oidhe* or *Mat abhann óigh*, these names meaning either ‘Mat of the river of song’ or ‘Mat of the *maiden* river’.
- ¹⁰⁷ The former name of Cluain Patrick, i.e. *Glún Phádraig*, was allegedly due to the imprint of St. Patrick’s knee on a stone. The name *Glún Phádraig* arises in the *Book of Lecan* as a boundary point to land from which St. Kerrill received stipends.
- ¹⁰⁸ On Mount Talbot.
- ¹⁰⁹ It is promulgated in Wales that Pryderi is buried near Maentwrog.
- ¹¹⁰ The oldest known name for the Suck is *An Dubh-abhainn Bbreá*, meaning ‘the beautiful (or serviceable) river’. Allegedly the name *Suck* came from *Sogha*, daughter of *Cairbre*, who was drowned in it. John O’Donovan noted (c.1838) “It varies in breadth from 650 links to 250 links and contains a great number of small islands.”
- ¹¹¹ *Neannta Caille*: ‘*Neanta* of loss/forfeiting’. Having been driven from the Suck, Pryderi’s men were harried as they retreated, but were engaged again in battle, probably at *Síodhb*

Reclaiming the Spoils of Annwfn

Neannta, now called 'Fairymount', near Drumdaff, Co. Roscommon. Peace was made and hostages forfeited. But on returning, as the opponent footmen came close again to cross the ford at Garrower, missiles were thrown and hostilities recommenced. Pryderi, to stop further killing, challenged Gwydion to a duel, he being the cause of the war. Pryderi was slain.

¹¹² Milo De Cogan.

¹¹³ Written *Lleawch* phonetically in Middle Welsh. It means 'a hawk'.

¹¹⁴ Written *Lleminawc* phonetically in Middle Welsh. It means 'a beast' or 'a strong man'.

¹¹⁵ The 'cauldron' of legends, poetry etc., belonging to king Rory O'Conor.

¹¹⁶ In a medieval Welsh poem the Abbeygrey circular site was referred to as a blessed/heavenly wheel.

¹¹⁷ Called the "isle of the strong door" in the poem *Preiddeu Annwn*. This is *Cathair Dá Tul* (phonetically *Caer Dathyl* in Middle Welsh).

¹¹⁸ The words 'jet-stained waters' merely imply that the Cloonlion River issues from boglands. 'Soft jet' is an organic mineral produced from timber compressed in bogs for eons.

¹¹⁸ Evidently the name by which the monks at Abbeygrey knew their property.

¹²⁰ The 'page' reference is to the manuscript pages that were seized by the Normans.

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