

Irish words and phrases noted in Massbrook
Upper, Co. Mayo, in the 1960s



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IRISH WORDS AND PHRASES NOTED IN
MASSBROOK UPPER, CO. MAYO, IN THE 1960s

ABSTRACT

During the latter part of the nineteenth century the Irish language faded out rapidly in Central Mayo between the towns of Ballina and Castlebar, and there are few records of the survival of Irish vocabulary in the English speech of this area. In this article I list and discuss Irish words and phrases noted down in the 1960s in the townland of Massbrook Upper, near Bofeenaun, Co. Mayo. Many of these refer to plants and animals, and some are rare or otherwise unattested. It is also worth recording the survival in Massbrook of lore relating to the *riabhach*-days 'three days of bad weather in early April', the *pruthóg* 'outdoor cooking of eggs to celebrate Easter', and *gealach na gcoinlín* 'the harvest moon'.

WHILE A STUDENT of Early and Modern Irish at Trinity College Dublin in the 1960s, I noted down some Irish words and phrases used in speech in a number of households in the townland of Massbrook Upper, near Bofeenaun, Co. Mayo. This short list is without doubt a very incomplete record of the Irish-language tradition then surviving in the area. Nonetheless, it may help to cast light on the use and origin of some forms of special interest, such as *coisí deasa* 'hare', *preaba' poll* 'rabbit', *creabhar* 'horse-fly', *gabhairín deorach* 'snipe', *bó brada* 'thieving cow', *sceachach* 'whitethorn', *fatha* ' (ground-dwelling) monster', *gealach na gcoinlín* 'harvest moon', *laighe* 'spade', *sraith* 'layer of vegetation on top of water'. I also hope that my discussion of *buachallán* 'ragwort, etc.' may advance understanding of this intriguing word with its wide variety of forms and applications.

The vocabulary assembled here was collected informally over a number of years, mainly during visits to neighbouring houses. It is difficult to provide an accurate age-profile of the various speakers to whom I owe this material. In general, the words relating to animals and plants came from my contemporaries – then in their teens or early twenties – who had a fair knowledge of the natural history of the area. Irish terminology relating to local folklore was mainly obtained from the older generation, especially from John Maloney (then in his fifties) and from Anthony Moran (then in his seventies).¹

¹I owe a particular debt of gratitude to John Maloney and to Anthony Moran. In addition, I would like to thank Andrew Barrett, Ellen Brogan (née McHale), Patrick Earley, Anthony Kenny, Anne Maloney (née Finnerty), Kate Maloney, Patrick Maloney and Thomas Maloney. For their helpful comments and suggestions during the preparation of this article, I am grateful to Ruairi Ó hUiginn, Feargal Ó Béarra, Colm Lankford and Michael O'Connell. I am also most appreciative of the valuable comments of the anonymous external reader. I am alone responsible for any errors or omissions.

The Irish of Central Mayo has not been as well documented as that of other parts of the county. In 1958 the South Mayo dialect of Tourmakeady was described by Seán de Búrca,² and in 1968 Éamonn Mhac an Fhailigh published a survey of the West Mayo dialect of Erris.³ Thomas J. Lavin was awarded a PhD at University College Galway in 1956 for his thesis 'The Irish of East Mayo: a phonetic study', but it remains unpublished. However, he contributed notes and texts from East Mayo in *Éigse* 8–9.⁴

Fr Michael Comer published an article in 1986 entitled 'As she was spoke: traces of the Irish language in Began'.⁵ A speaker from East Mayo – James Duffy (Séamus Ó Dufaigh) of Kilmovee – was interviewed by Kevin Danaher and Myles Dillon in 1949, and provided the material for a note by the latter in *Celtica* 10.⁶ This informant died in 1959 at the age of ninety-two. Extracts from the interview have been published by Ríonach úi Ógáin in *Béaloides* 69.⁷

In his *Linguistic Atlas and Survey of Irish Dialects* Heinrich Wagner started his survey of Mayo Irish at Tourmakeady (point 51), and then moved up the coast from Louisburgh (point 52) to the Curraun Peninsula (point 53), and on to Achill (point 54), Dohooma (point 55), Blacksod (point 56), Portacloy (point 57), Belderg (point 58), Ballycastle (point 59), and finally inland to Kilmovee near the border with Co. Roscommon (point 62).⁸ In continuation of this work, a series of monographs was published by the Department of Celtic, Queen's University Belfast.⁹ Of these, Gerard Stockman's study, *The Irish of Achill*, described the dialect spoken at points 53 and 54.¹⁰ In *ZCP* 30–1, John Noel Hamilton contributed translations and discussion of texts from point 57.¹¹ In *Studia Celtica* 2, Richard Skerrett published notes on the dialect of some of the inhabitants of the Inishkea islands – situated off the Belmullet peninsula – who had relocated to Erris.¹² As far as I am aware, the only linguistic account

²Seán de Búrca, *The Irish of Tourmakeady, Co. Mayo: A Phonemic Study* (Dublin, 1958; repr. 1970, 2007).

³Éamonn Mhac an Fhailigh, *The Irish of Erris, Co. Mayo: A Phonemic Study* (Dublin, 1968; repr. 1980).

⁴Thomas J. Lavin, 'Notes on the Irish of East Mayo: 1', *Éigse: A Journal of Irish Studies* 8 (1956–7), 309–21; idem, 'Notes on the Irish of East Mayo: 2', *Éigse: A Journal of Irish Studies* 9 (1958–61), 10–17; idem, 'Some texts from East Mayo Irish', *Éigse* 9, 111–13.

⁵Michael Comer, 'As she was spoke: traces of the Irish language in Began', in Fr Michael Comer and Nollaig Ó Muraile (eds), *Béacán/Bekan: Portrait of an East Mayo Parish* (Ballinrobe, 1986), 140–5.

⁶Myles Dillon, 'Vestiges of the Irish dialect of East Mayo', *Celtica* 10 (1973) 15–21.

⁷Ríonach úi Ógáin, 'Téacsanna Gaeilge ó Oirthear Mhaigh Eo: Irish texts from East Mayo', *Béaloides: The Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society* 69 (2001), 174–9.

⁸Heinrich Wagner, *Linguistic Atlas and Survey of Irish Dialects*, 3 vols (Dublin, 1958–66; repr. 1981–2), i, Introduction, pp. xvii–xix.

⁹*Ibid.*, 301 (Bibliographical Note by Eugene McKendry in 1981 reprint of vol. i).

¹⁰Gerard Stockman, *The Irish of Achill, Co. Mayo: A Miscellaneous Collection of Linguistic Material from the Parish of Achill with a Phonetic Description of the Dialect*, *Studies in Irish Language and Literature* 2 (Belfast, 1974).

¹¹John N. Hamilton, 'Phonetic texts of the Irish of North Mayo: part 1', *ZCP* 30 (1967), 265–353; idem, 'Phonetic texts of the Irish of North Mayo: part 2', *ZCP* 31 (1970) 147–223.

¹²R. A. Q. Skerrett, 'Notes on the dialect of the Inishkea islanders', *SC* 2 (1967), 196–201.

dealing specifically with the Irish of central Mayo is that of Éamonn Mhac an Fhailigh, who published notes based on tape-recordings of an evening's conversation with James Deasy of Rinn an Eanaigh, three miles from Foxford.¹³

The townlands of Massbrook Lower, Massbrook Upper and Massbrook South in the barony of Addergoole extend from Levalley Lough up to Massbrook mountain (1296 ft = 395 m). The name of the townlands derives from the Massbrook river, originally *Sruthán an Aifrinn* 'the stream of the Mass', harking back to the days when Mass had to be celebrated in remote localities to escape the attention of the authorities. This river feeds into Lough Conn. The nearest town is Lahardane (*Leathardán*), situated at the foot of Nephin mountain (2644 ft = 806 m). It is clear that Irish was the usual language of communication in this area at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was the first language of Archbishop John McHale (Seán Mac Héil) who was born in 1791 in Tubbernavene (*Tobar na bhFian*), a village which is adjacent to Massbrook Lower. His father was a farmer and inn-keeper who ensured that his family also obtained a good knowledge of English. Seán was appointed to the see of Tuam in 1834. He maintained an interest in the Irish language throughout his life, and published a number of translations of devotional material into Irish, as well as translations of Moore's melodies and part of the *Iliad*. He preached a sermon in Irish every Sunday at Tuam Cathedral, and gave his last sermon at Mass in April 1881, only a few months before his death.¹⁴

There was a general decline in the use of Irish during the second half of the nineteenth century in the area between the towns of Ballina and Castlebar. The Famine of 1845–8 was especially severe in Co. Mayo, and established a regular pattern of emigration to America and Britain.¹⁵ It should also be noted that the first-class fishing available in the River Moy, Lough Conn and Lough Cullen attracted fishermen from far and wide. To cater for their needs, a good knowledge of English was essential. Nonetheless, the census returns for 1901 and 1911 indicate that there were considerable numbers of Irish-speakers in the Massbrook area, particularly among the older generation.¹⁶ For example, in the 1901 census it is recorded that in twenty-five of the twenty-six households in Massbrook Upper some or all of the occupants could speak Irish. Mary Earley, aged seventy-three, is recorded as speaking Irish only. In the 1911 census the situation is similar: there are Irish-speakers in all but one of the twenty-eight households. Thomas Kenny – aged forty-five years and the head of a household – is recorded as speaking Irish only, though his wife Marian is stated to speak English only. However, in the 1901 census Thomas is recorded as being able to speak both English and Irish.

¹³Éamonn Mhac an Fhailigh, 'Notes on a Mayo dialect', *Celtica* 12 (1977), 171–84.

¹⁴For his relationship with the Irish language, see Tomás Mac Aoidh, 'Leon Tréada Iúda', in Áine Ní Cheanainn (ed.), *Leon an Iarthair: Aistí ar Sheán Mac Héil Ardeaspag Thuama 1834–1881* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1983), 15–24; Nollaig Ó Muraile, 'Staid na Gaeilge i gConnachta', *ibid.*, 37–66.

¹⁵See Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, *'I mBéal an Bháis: The Great Famine and the Language Shift in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Quinnipiac and Cork, 2015).

¹⁶www.census.nationalarchives.ie (census years 1901, 1911 /Mayo /Addergoole /Massbrook Upper; accessed 26 September 2024).

Under the direction of Séamus Ó Duilearga and Seán Ó Súilleabháin, the Irish Folklore Commission – with the co-operation of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation and the Department of Education – organised the collection of local traditions and stories by primary schoolchildren of the Irish Free State in the years 1937–8.¹⁷ This extraordinarily enlightened and far-sighted scheme resulted in the creation of over half a million manuscript pages and has proved a goldmine for subsequent generations of researchers.¹⁸ The names of only two speakers of Irish are recorded in the contributions by pupils of the National Schools at Massbrook and Lahardane. A pupil named Joseph Reilly of Massbrook National School records that 'Mrs Kenny can speak Irish and tell Irish stories. She has also a great collection of old Irish songs. She is living in Massbrook Upper'.¹⁹ Mary Doyle, a pupil in Lahardane National School, states that 'the oldest person in the village [of Tubbernavreen] is Bridgid Corcoran, who is ninety years of age and is still hale and hearty. She can speak English and Irish and can also tell stories in English and Irish'.²⁰ There are references in the Schools' collection to the *riabhach*-days 'three days of bad weather in early April' and to the *pruthóg* 'outdoor cooking of eggs to celebrate Easter': see below.

1. TRADITIONS, CUSTOMS, SEASONS

(a) **fatha'** /'fahə/ 'supernatural creature, giant, monster'. ModIr *fathach* derives from OIr *aithech* 'rent-payer, commoner', with initial inorganic *f*-. As is often the case with Irish words in *-ach* employed in the English of Co. Mayo, the final voiceless velar fricative /x/ is lost, cf. *geala'* for *gealach* 'moon', *brada'* for *bradach* 'thieving', *searra'* for *searrach* 'colt'.²¹ Already in MÍr this word developed the pejorative sense of 'churl, oaf',²² and in later folklore it is employed to describe supernatural beings, generally of large size.²³ A Neolithic or Early Bronze Age stone circle – approximately 36 feet (11 m) in diameter – on the lower slopes of Massbrook mountain is known as the 'Fatha's Garden', and local tradition has it that a fierce ground-dwelling *fatha* guarded a cache of gold buried in the centre of the circle. I got no information on the reputed size of the *fatha*, but the tradition that the area within the stone circle was his 'garden' suggests that he was of diminutive stature rather than a giant.

¹⁷ www.duchas.ie (The Schools' Collection; accessed 26 September 2024).

¹⁸ See Séamas Ó Catháin, 'Súil siar ar Scéim na Scol 1937–1938', *Sinsear: The Folklore Journal* 5 (1988), 19–30.

¹⁹ The Schools' Collection, vol. 0149: Massbrook N. S., p. 428 (www.duchas.ie). She was the mother of our next-door neighbour Anthony Kenny, who served in the Connaught Rangers and survived the Gallipoli campaign of 1915–16.

²⁰ The Schools' Collection, vol. 0150: Lahardane N. S., p. 6. This is presumably the Bridget Corcoran of Tubbernavreen, Addergoole, whose age is given as fifty-nine in the 1911 census.

²¹ On the other hand, /x/ is retained in *riabhach* 'brindled', *praiseach* 'charlock', *oighreach* 'chilblains', *óinseach* 'female fool'.

²² DIL s.v. 1 *aithech*.

²³ Niall Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1977), s.v. *fathach*; Patrick Dinneen, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* (Dublin, 1927) s.vv. *athach*, *fathach*; Seán Ó Súilleabháin, *A Handbook of Irish Folklore* (Dublin, 1942), 448–9.

The Massbrook *fatha* can thus be compared with the better-known *leprechaun* (*lúchorpán* ‘one with a small body’) of Irish folklore. In attempts to find the gold, this monument was dug up with spades in the late nineteenth century and comprehensively wrecked with heavy machinery about thirty years ago.

(b) **fear bréige** /f'ar 'br' e:g'ə/ ‘false man’. On the top of Massbrook mountain a heap of stones has been erected – apparently within the last couple of centuries – to serve as a landmark. This is known as *Fear bréige* ‘false man’ or *Mainín* /man'i:n' / ‘little man’. The term *fear bréige*, lit. ‘man of falsehood’, is most commonly attested in Irish dialects in the meaning ‘scare-crow’,²⁴ but Dinneen also records the meaning ‘heap of stones resembling a man’, as in the Massbrook usage.²⁵

(c) **geala' na gcoinlín** /g'alə nə 'gunl'i:n' / ‘harvest moon’. For reasons connected with the tilt of the earth as it rotates, the full moon closest to the autumnal equinox appears to persist low on the horizon for a number of successive nights. It seems larger than usual and may have a yellow or orange tinge: a ScG name for it is *gealach bhuidhe an abachaidh* ‘the yellow moon of the ripening [of the harvest]’.²⁶ Dinneen gives the form *gealach na gcoinnlí* ‘the moon of the stubble’,²⁷ and Ó Dónaill has *gealach na gcoinnlí* and *gealach na gcoinleach*.²⁸ The noun *coinnlín* is a diminutive of *connall* ‘stalk’, a borrowing from Latin *cannula* ‘reed, stalk, stem’.²⁹ I recorded the pronunciation /g'alə nə 'gunl'i:n' / from Anthony Moran. John Maloney had a pronunciation which I noted down as /g'alə nə 'glu:n'i:n' /.

(d) **poitín** /put'i:n' / ‘illegal spirit’. Much Massbrook folklore relates to the illegal distillation of *poitín*, with emphasis on the ingenious methods by which the agents of government authority – whether Royal Irish Constabulary or An Garda Síochána – were outwitted by local distillers. The etymology of the word *poitín* is uncertain. Dinneen takes the basic meaning to be ‘small pot’, a diminutive of *pota* ‘pot’.³⁰ The Donegal pronunciation *poítín* may have been influenced by *poit* ‘drink, draught’.³¹

²⁴ Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir s.v. fear*; Stockman, *The Irish of Achill*, 371 s.v. *fear*.

²⁵ Dinneen, *Foclóir s.v. fear*.

²⁶ Edward Dwelly, *Faclair Gàidhlig le Dealbhan: The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary* (5th ed. Glasgow, 1949), s.v. *gealach*.

²⁷ Dinneen, *Foclóir s.vv. gealach, coinnlín*.

²⁸ Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir s.v. gealach*.

²⁹ Kuno Meyer, *Contributions to Irish Lexicography A-C* (Halle, 1906), 476 s.v. *connall*; LEIA C-190 s.v. *condall*; DIL s.vv. *condall, coinnlín(e)*; Dinneen, *Foclóir s.vv. coinnle, coinnleog, coinnlín*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir s.v. coinlín*. For an additional OIr attestation of *connall*, see Liam Breatnach, ‘An Old Irish gloss on *Cáin Lánamna*’, *Ériu* 57 (2007), 155–63, at 155.

³⁰ Dinneen, *Foclóir s.v. poitín*. The term was also used in the Mayo area of the hole at the base of a lime-kiln, where the broken lime-stone was inserted for burning: see The Schools Collection, vol. 0120: Turlough N. S. pp. 175–6.

³¹ DIL s.vv. *poit, pótaire*. In Glencolumbkille, Co. Donegal, *poitín* used to be flavoured with the berries of the juniper (*Juniperus communis*, local name *aiteannach*).

(e) **pruthóg** /'pruho:g/ 'outdoor fire for cooking eggs'. This word occurs in a variety of forms and meanings in Modlr. It derives from OIr *bruth* 'heat, blaze, boiling', cognate with Welsh *brwd* 'warmth'.³² In Massbrook the word *pruthóg* refers specifically to the outdoor cooking of eggs by children to celebrate Easter. The procedure is described in the 1938 Schools' Collection by pupils from Massbrook and Lahardane National Schools.³³ Under the headword *bruthóg*, Dinneen gives its first meaning as 'a batch of potatoes roasted', but otherwise a direct connection with cooking is absent: 'a small quantity of potatoes, eggs, etc.', 'a collection of eggs, apples, etc.', 'a batch of eggs sold to make pocket-money'. He notes the variants *pruthóg* (Sligo) and *bruithneog* (Conamara).³⁴ In his *Foclóir Ó Dónaill* employs the headword *bruithneog*, and gives the meanings 'batch of potatoes roasted in ashes', 'clutch of hen's eggs in a nest', 'small plump woman'.³⁵ The meaning of the word is extended to include a quantity of money in the Anglo-Irish dialect of Bekan, Co. Mayo: Michael Comer records the phrase 'they got a fine *prochóg* of money out of the accident'.³⁶

Some speakers placed the main stress on the second syllable of this word: I noted the pronunciation /prə'hɔ:g/ from Anthony Kenny. The transfer of stress from the first to the second syllable of disyllabic words occurs occasionally in Connacht – particularly in Co. Mayo – and has been described by Éamonn Mhac an Fhailigh in his survey of the Irish of Erris.³⁷ He records /kra:n/ as well as /kora:n/ (*corrán* 'reaping hook'), /bre:d/ as well as /bure:d/ (*bairréad* 'cap'). In some cases, only forms with elision of the first syllable are recorded, e.g. /br'a:n/ (*biorán* 'pin'), /kro:n' / (*coróin* 'crown'). Myles Dillon draws attention to the same phenomenon in his note on the Irish of a speaker from Kilmovee in East Mayo.³⁸ See also discussion under 4(d) *dorú* below.

(f) **riabhach-days** /'r'iawəx 'de:z/. Traditions regarding the fate of a legendary *bó riabhach* 'brindled cow' are attested from many parts of the country, and are quoted to explain a spell of bad weather in early April.³⁹ A detailed account of the cow's death is given in the diary of Amhlaoibh Ó Súilleabháin for the year 1827.⁴⁰ He lists the three days of the old brindled cow (*trí laethe na*

³² LEIA B-106 s.v. *bruth*.

³³ The Schools' Collection, vol. 0149: Massbrook N. S. pp. 355, 379; vol. 0150: Lahardane N. S. p. 108.

³⁴ Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. *bruthóg*; cf. Brian Ó Curnáin, *The Irish of Iorras Aithneach, Co. Galway*, 4 vols (Dublin, 2007), iv, 2411 s.v. *bruithneog*, *bruthnóg* 'potato roasted in ashes'.

³⁵ Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v. *bruithneog*.

³⁶ Comer, 'As she was spoke', 144 s.v. *prochóg*.

³⁷ Éamonn Mhac an Fhailigh, *The Irish of Erris*, 140 §312.

³⁸ Myles Dillon, 'Vestiges of the Irish dialect of East Mayo', *Celtica* 10 (1973), 15–21, at 17 (ii).

³⁹ E.g. Éamonn Mhac an Fhailigh, 'A Westmeath word-list', *Éigse: A Journal of Irish Studies* 5 (1945–7), 256–66, at 264 s.v. *riabhach* /ri:bəx/.

⁴⁰ Séamus Ua Casaide (ed.), 'Cinn-lae Amhlaoibh Uí Shúilleabháin: 1827', *Gadelica: A Journal of Modern-Irish Studies* 1 (Dublin, 1912–13), 51–61, at 59.167–81; Michael McGrath (ed. and trans.), *Cinnlae Amhlaoibh Uí Shúilleabháin: The Diary of Humphrey O'Sullivan*, 4 vols (London, 1936–37), i, 17–19; Tomás de Bhaldraithe (ed.), *Cín Lae Amhlaoibh* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1970), 4.105–23; cf. Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. *riabhach*.

seanriabhiche) as 12, 13 and 14 April,⁴¹ and recounts how in bygone times this cow celebrated the coming of April by running around and bellowing with joy at the passing of the hardship of March. Offended, March decided to avenge the cow's insolence and asked April to lend him three days. April consented to the deal, on condition that March married her. Accordingly – in the words of Amhlaoiuibh – *do shéid an ghaoth chruaidh chráite ghoineadach gháifeach anoir ó dhroim Alban, agus dochuadh an seanriabhach a ccae ag iaradh fear glas bhí a fás air uachtar bogaich agus do báthadh í. Gona uadh so ráidhtear trí laethe na seinriabhiche* 'the harsh tormented wounding spear-like east wind blew from the back of Scotland, and the old brindled cow went her way looking for the green grass which was growing on top of a bog, and she was drowned. From that is named the three days of the old brindled cow'. The evil reputation of early April is also reflected in the ScG term *cailleach* 'hag', applied to the week beginning 12 April (Old Style).⁴²

Versions of this story were in general currency in the Massbrook area in the 1960s, and two accounts of the '*riabhach*-days' are included in the Schools' collection of 1938.⁴³ The demand made by the month of March was sometimes quoted in a verse in English: 'April, April, stand to me now; and lend me three days to skin this old cow'.⁴⁴ In the version of the tale recorded by the Massbrook pupil Charles Kelly, the cow is referred to as *riabhóg*, rather than *riabhach*.⁴⁵ This variant is also recorded in the Anglo-Irish dialect of North Roscommon with the pronunciation /ri:βo-g/.⁴⁶ Generally, the word *riabhóg* is applied in ModIr to small striped birds, such as the meadow pipit (*Anthus pratensis*).⁴⁷ It is noteworthy, however, that this is the form recorded by Karen Corrigan in her study of Irish words employed in the English of Northern Ireland. She cites *reevogue* 'borrowing days'.⁴⁸

2. NAMES OF WILD ANIMALS, BIRDS, INSECTS, ETC.

(a) **coisí deasa** /'kufi: d'asə/ 'fine legs' = 'hare' (*Lepus timidus hibernicus*). In many cultures there are taboos against referring to animals by their ordinary names, particularly when they are to be hunted. These are known to anthropologists as *noa*-terms from the Polynesian word for an animal which should not be called by its original historical name for fear of bad luck. The Irish language is rich in such terminology. For example, the regular name for the fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) is *sinnach*, but it is also known as *mad(r)adh ruadh* 'red dog',

⁴¹These dates in the Gregorian calendar (New Style) correspond to the beginning of the month in the Julian calendar (Old Style).

⁴²Dwelly, *Faclair* s.v. *cailleach*.

⁴³The Schools' Collection, vol. 0149: Massbrook N. S. pp. 352, 402.

⁴⁴This verse is quoted by a pupil Mary Doyle in the Schools' Collection, vol. 0150: Lahardane N. S. p. 100. I also heard it from John Maloney.

⁴⁵The Schools' collection, vol. 0149: Massbrook N. S. p. 352.

⁴⁶P. L. Henry, *An Anglo-Irish Dialect of North Roscommon: Phonology, Accidence, Syntax* (Dublin, 1957), Index, p. 229 s.v. *riabhóg*, *reevogue*.

⁴⁷Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. *riabhóg*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v. *riabhóg*.

⁴⁸Karen P. Corrigan, *Dialects of English: Irish English*, vol. 1: *Northern Ireland* (Edinburgh, 2010), 94 (table 4.3).

loisfhionnán ‘the one with the white-tipped tail’, and *crimthann* ‘the pungent-smelling one’.⁴⁹ Similarly, the Indo-European word for the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) survives in the Irish word *Art*, commonly attested as a personal name.⁵⁰ When used in relation to an animal, the *noa*-terms *mathgamain* ‘good calf’ and *milchobur* ‘desirer of honey’ are substituted.⁵¹

My informant John Maloney interpreted *coisí deasa* as meaning ‘fine legs’, taking *coisí* to be a plural of *cos*. In his study of the Irish of Erris, Éamonn Mhac an Fhailigh records the use of the nom. pl. *cosaí* /kosi:/.⁵² Similarly, Brian Ó Curnáin gives *cosaí* /kosi:/ as a variant of nom. pl. *cosa* /kosə/ in the Irish of Iorras Aithneach, Co. Galway.⁵³ It is unlikely that *coisí* is the singular noun ‘walker, goer, one who uses his feet’, as the final -a of the plural adj. *deasa* was clearly articulated.⁵⁴

It was regarded as unlucky to shoot a hare: the proper procedure was to hunt it with hounds.

(b) **creabhar** /kr’auər/ ‘horse-fly, cleg’. The student of ethnozoology and ethnobotany often faces the problem of the use of the same term for unrelated species. Thus, OIr *corr* can be used of both the grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*) and the common crane (*Grus grus* (*Megalornis grus*)). The plant-name *gi(o)lcach* is similarly ambiguous: depending on the context it can apply to the broom (*Sarothamnus scoparius*) or to the reed (*Phragmites communis*). In the case of *creabhar* (OIr *crebar*), the word is commonly employed of the woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*), but it is also applied to the various species of horse-fly or cleg which suck blood from mammals, including humans.⁵⁵ For example, in an EModIr description of Hell, the torments inflicted on the damned include

⁴⁹ *Crimthann* is well-attested as a proper name in early Irish sources: see Carl Marstrander, *Une correspondance germano-celtique* (Kristiania, 1924), 9–10. In glossaries this word is identified with the fox: *crimthand* .i. *sinnach* (DIL s.v. *crimthan(n)*). Marstrander (p. 10) suggests with a question mark that it is a taboo term for this animal, but provides no further discussion. Rudolf Thurneysen links *crimthann* with *crem* ‘wild garlic’, postulating a stem *cremu-* (GOI 52 §80). I believe that both scholars are correct in seeing a connection between *crem* and *crimthann*. The feature in common is no doubt the pervasive rank odour of both fox and wild garlic. Admittedly, the scent of a male fox would generally be regarded as a great deal more unpleasant than that of wild garlic. On the other hand, one can compare the place-name *Chicago* which derives from the Algonquian *Shikaakwa* ‘place of wild garlic or ramsons’ (John F. Swenson, ‘Chicagoua / Chicago: the origin, meaning and etymology of a place name’, *Illinois Historical Journal* 84/4 (Winter 1991), 235–48). It is cognate with the word *skunk* which can be traced back to Proto-Algonquian *šeka-kwa* (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 5th ed. (2011), s.v. *skunk*).

⁵⁰ IEW 875; Michael O’Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin, 1962; repr. 1976, 2005): Index of personal names, s.vv. *Artt*, *Artán*, *Artacán*, *Artgal*, *Artí*.

⁵¹ Seán Mac Suibhne, *Tótamas in Éirinn* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1961), 27. The archaeological evidence indicates that the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) has not been present in Ireland since the Early Bronze Age. However, knowledge of the habits of the bear may have persisted through contact with Scotland: see discussion at Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish Farming: A Study Based Mainly on the Law-texts of the Seventh and Eighth Centuries AD*, Early Irish Law Series 4 (Dublin, 1997), 190–1.

⁵² Mhac an Fhailigh, *The Irish of Erris*, 183 §504 (i).

⁵³ Ó Curnáin, *The Irish of Iorras Aithneach*, ii, 864 §4.231.

⁵⁴ Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. *coisidhe*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v. *coisí*.

⁵⁵ DIL s.v. *crebar* (a), (b).

creabhair chroma cruadhghobacha ‘stooped harsh-mouthed horse-flies’.⁵⁶ In Massbrook, the species *Haematopota pluvialis* is an extremely common and persistent pest in summer; it always goes by the name *creabhar*. The same term is applied to the larger horse-fly *Tabanus sudeticus*. Brian Ó Curnáin notes the variants *cleabhar*, *creabhar*, *treabhar* in West Galway.⁵⁷ In some dialects the adj. *caoch* ‘one-eyed’ may be added, e.g. *creabhar caoch* /kr’aur ke:x/ (Ballyvourney).⁵⁸ This refers to the fact that the two large eyes of horseflies are set so close together that they appear to be a single eye.

In his etymological dictionary, Joseph Vendryes gives the meanings ‘bécasse’ (woodcock) and ‘taon’ (horsefly).⁵⁹ He comments on the difficulty of finding a common denominator between these animals (*Il est difficile de trouver un dénominateur commun à tous ces animaux: on ne voit pas non plus à quoi ce mot peut se rattacher*). However, it seems likely that what the horse-fly and woodcock have in common is a distinctive low-pitched sound.⁶⁰ The male woodcock makes a grunting call at dusk and dawn, which is termed ‘roding’. Similarly, various species of horse-fly make a low humming sound as they attack.⁶¹

(c) **gabhairín deora** /’gaur’i:n’ d’o:rə/. The common snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) is much sought after by the shooter of game, as the flavour of its flesh is outstanding.⁶² The Irish word *náescu* ‘snipe’ is attested as early as Cormac’s Glossary, compiled in the tenth century. Here it is explained *Naiscu i. en uisce* ‘a water bird’.⁶³ Variants are recorded in all ModIr dialects, e.g. *naosc*

⁵⁶Charles Plummer (ed. and trans.), *Bethada Náem nĒrenn: Lives of Irish Saints*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1922), i, 99 §10; Rudolf Thurneysen (ed.), ‘Eine Variante der Brendan-Legende’, *ZCP* 10 (1915), 408–20, at 413.17. The version in the Book of Lismore has *creabair croma cnamhghobacha* ‘stooped bone-mouthed horse-flies’ (Whitley Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore* (Oxford, 1890), 109.3652–3).

⁵⁷Ó Curnáin, *The Irish of Lorras Aithneach* iv, p. 2431 s.v. *cleabhar*.

⁵⁸Brian Ó Cuív (ed.), *Cnósach Focal ó Bhaile Bhúirne i gCunndae Chorcaí: Mícheál Ó Briain (1866–1942) a bhailig* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1947), 70. It is also noted here that in English this fly was called ‘the doctor’ on account of its blood-letting habits. This use is also recorded in Risteard B. Breatnach (ed.), *Seana-chaint na nDéise II: Studies in the Vocabulary and Idiom of Déise Irish Based Mainly on Material Collected by Archbishop Michael Sheehan (1870–1945)* (Dublin, 1961; repr. 1984), 117 n. 5.

⁵⁹*LEIA* C-224–5 s.v. *crebar*. He also gives the meaning ‘chouette’ (owl), based on the Mlr gloss *lucifugia* .i. *crebhar* (Whitley Stokes, *Irish Glosses: A Mediæval Tract on Latin Declension* (Dublin, 1860), 8.204). However, Stokes in his notes on p. 57 identifies *creabhar* here as meaning ‘woodcock’. The Latin term *lucifugia* ‘avoiding light’ no doubt refers to the fact that the woodcock flies mainly at dawn and dusk, so there is no evidence of *creabhar* being applied to any species of owl.

⁶⁰In his study of the root-formations of various Irish bird and animal names, Carl Marstrander, ‘Hibernica 26’, *ZCP* 7 (1910), 390–95, at 392–3, makes the case that the underlying meaning of *creabhar* is ‘a beast which makes a growling or buzzing sound’ (‘knurrendes, brummendes Tier’). I believe that his translation of Blasket *cleabhar caoch* as ‘Rebhuhn’ (partridge) rather than ‘Viehbremse’ (horsefly) is incorrect, but this does not affect his basic argument.

⁶¹Admittedly – unlike most other species of horse-fly – *Haematopota pluvialis* attacks with only a faint hum.

⁶²Gordon D’Arcy, *The Guide to the Birds of Ireland* (Dublin, 1981), 87–8.

⁶³Kuno Meyer (ed.), ‘*Sanas Cormaic*’, *Anecdota*, iv, 85 §986.

(Galway, Mayo), *naoscan* (Donegal), *naoscach* (Munster).⁶⁴ Scottish Gaelic has *naosg*, *naosga*, *naosgach*, *naosgamh*.⁶⁵ I did not hear *naosc* in Massbrook, but noted from John Maloney the form *gabhairín deora(ch)*, used in the sense of ‘common snipe’. Because it overlaps in meaning with *naosc(ach)*, this word has caused much difficulty for lexicographers. It may be a *noa*-term, as in the case of *coisí deasa* discussed above. The word *gabhairín* is a diminutive of *gabhar* ‘goat’, and refers to the sound of the vibration of the snipe’s outer tail feathers – mainly made by the male during its courtship display flights at dusk.⁶⁶ This sound is widely judged to be similar to the bleating of a kid goat.⁶⁷ In his *Foclóir*, Ó Dónaill gives the forms *gabhar deorach* and *gabhar reo* in the meaning ‘male snipe’.⁶⁸ He takes *deorach* to mean ‘strange, wandering’,⁶⁹ but it seems more likely to be from *deor* ‘tear’, referring to the mournful nature of the bleating sound. From Achill, Stockman records the variant *gabhar deorann*.⁷⁰ Under the head-word *gabhairín*, Ó Dónaill gives *gabhairín reo* in the meaning ‘male snipe’, but makes no reference to *gabhairín deorach*.⁷¹ Dinneen takes the form *gabhairín reodha* to refer to the smaller and rarer ‘jack snipe’ (*Lymnocyrtus minimus*).⁷² He suggests that *reodha* is gen. sg. of *reodh* ‘hoarfrost’, presumably referring to the fact that the jack snipe is a winter visitor to Ireland, and – unlike the common snipe – does not breed here.

(d) **preaba’ poll** /pr’abə paul/ ‘hopping of holes’ = ‘rabbit’ (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*). As in the case of the hare, the rabbit may be known by a *noa*-term in the context of hunting. The original form of the name is likely to have been *preabaire poll* ‘hole-hopper’, as recorded from East Galway by T. S. Ó Máille.⁷³ He notes that the term is said to originate from Co. Sligo.⁷⁴ In his *Foclóir*, Ó Dónaill gives the form *preabaire poill* ‘rabbit’ with gen. sg. of *poll* ‘hole’.⁷⁵

⁶⁴Wagner, *Linguistic Atlas*, i, 220; Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.vv. *naosca*, *naoscán*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v. *naoscach*.

⁶⁵Dwelly, *Faclair* s.vv.

⁶⁶The nightjar or goatsucker (*Caprimulgus europaeus*) is an unrelated species which gets its Latin name from the false belief that it milks goats during the night. Its Irish name *tuirne lín*, lit. ‘spinning wheel’ refers to the repetitive ‘churring’ sound made by this bird.

⁶⁷One can compare the traditional West Wicklow name for the common snipe, ‘Minny Gower’ /mini: ‘gauər/, i.e. *meannán gabhair* ‘kid of a goat’ (I am grateful to Séamas Bermingham for this information).

⁶⁸Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v. *gabhar* (3).

⁶⁹Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v. *deorach* (2).

⁷⁰Stockman, *The Irish of Achill*, 372.

⁷¹Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v. *gabhairín* (2).

⁷²D’Arcy, *Guide to the Birds of Ireland*, 86–7; Dwelly, *Faclair* s.v. *gabhrag bheag* ‘jack snipe’. P. L. Henry, ‘A linguistic survey of Ireland: preliminary report’, *Lochlann: A Review of Celtic Studies* 1 (1958), 49–208, at 192, quotes the form /gau’Ri’n ‘Ru-’/ ‘jacksnipe’ from Ballymakeery, Co. Cork.

⁷³T. S. Ó Máille, ‘Liosta focal as Oirthear na Gaillimhe’, *Béaloideas: The Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society* 23 (1954), 230–36, at 235.

⁷⁴I am indebted to Feargal Ó Béarra for this reference. As discussed under *fatha*’ above, the *-ach* ending often loses its final /x/ in the dialect. It is therefore possible that *preaba*’ here originates as a substantival use of the adj. *preabach* ‘jumping, hopping’ (Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v.). But in view of the other attestations of *preabaire* it is more likely that *preaba*’ goes back to an original form in *-aire*.

⁷⁵Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v. *preabaire*.

(e) **sciortán** /ʃk'urta:n/ 'tick'. The word *sciortán* (*sceartán*) is well-attested in the modern dialects in the meaning 'tick', employed of various species of arachnid which attach themselves to mammals or birds to suck blood.⁷⁶ The species *Ixodes ricinus* was a common affliction of children who spent a lot of time in the fields, and was not regarded as more than a minor nuisance until the spread in the 1980s of Lyme Disease, a serious bacterial infection transmitted by ticks. In the earlier language a wider range of meanings is indicated for *scertán*. In a passage in a fifteenth-century medical text on the stings of scorpions, bees and wasps the Latin text has *Scorpiones sunt quedam animalia ad modum scarabeorum nisi quod habent caudas*.⁷⁷ This is translated into Irish as *.i. issed is scorpiones ann ainminnti is cusmail risna sceartánaibh crúbacha acht erbuill acu* 'i.e. scorpions are like clawed beetles except that they have tails'. Here the translator clearly identified *scarab* (a type of beetle) with Irish *sce(a)rtán*.

Sce(a)rtán is a diminutive with prosthetic *s-* of OIr *cert* 'louse, mite, tick'.⁷⁸ In the variant spelling *cart* the word is attested in the eighth-century voyage-tale *Immrama Curaig Mail Dúin* 'the voyage of the boat of Máel Dúin'.⁷⁹ The voyagers encountered a large bird on an island in the ocean afflicted 'with ticks which were on the cheeks and under the chin of the great bird, and around its eyes and around its ears' (... *inna cart ro bátar i n-oilib 7 fo smeich ind éoin móir 7 imma súili 7 imma chlúasa*).

(f) **seabhac** /ʃauk/ 'hawk'. Applied to the sparrow hawk (*Accipiter nisus*), kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) and other raptors.

(g) **spide neansaí** /ʃp'idə'n'ansi:/ 'hairy caterpillar'. The larvae of certain moths protect themselves with a coat of mildly poisonous hairs, which may cause a rash if handled. The largest of such larvae is that of the fox moth (*Macrothylacia rubi*), which is commonly encountered in late summer and autumn, and has English names such as 'hairy molly', 'woolly bear' or 'nettle-worm'. The form given in Dinneen's *Foclóir* is *speig neannta*. He identifies *speig* with Latin *species* 'shape, appearance, form', which makes good sense.⁸⁰ The form *nean(n)ta* is gen. sg. of the fem. noun *neanaidh*. This word for 'nettle' is well-attested, usually as a collective.⁸¹ For example, Mlr commentary on the Martyrology of Óengus refers to an old woman collecting nettles to make

⁷⁶Ó Curnáin, *The Irish of Iorras Aithneach*, iv, 2581 s.v. *sceartán*; Ó Cuív, *Cnósach Focal ó Bhaile Bhúirne*, 204 s.v. *sgeartán* (with cross-reference); Nioclás Breathnach, 'Focail Ghaeilge atá le clos sa Bhéarla a labhartar i gceannntar an Chaisleáin Nua, Co. Luimní', *Éigse: A Journal of Irish Studies* 6 (1948–52) 169–79, at 177 s.v. *sgiortán*; Nicholas Williams, 'Gaeilge na hIarmhí', in Eoin Mac Cárthaigh and Jürgen Uhlich (eds), *Féilscribhinn do Chathal Ó Háinle* (Indreabhán, 2012), 1009–58, at 1042 s.v. *ceartán*.

⁷⁷Standish O'Grady, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Library [formerly British Museum]*, i, (London, 1926; repr. Dublin, 1992), 213.

⁷⁸*DIL* s.vv. 4 *cert*, *scertán*; *LEIA* C-76 s.v. 4 *cert*.

⁷⁹A. G. Van Hamel (ed.), *Immrama*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 10 (Dublin, 1941; repr. 2004), 47.740.

⁸⁰Dinneen, *Foclóir*, s.v. *speig*; *DIL* s.v. *speic*; *LEIA* S-177 s.v. *speic*.

⁸¹*DIL* s.v. *neanid*.

broth from them (*ic ben nenta do denam praisce di*).⁸² In Modlr the nom. sg. *neanaidh* was generally superseded by the diminutive *neantóg*.⁸³

Many variants of *speig neannta* have been recorded. In the Index to his study of the Irish of Iorras Aithneach, Co. Galway, Brian Ó Curnáin lists *spig neanta*, *smig neánta*, *mig neánta*, *sprid neanta*; pl. *spineantógachaí*, *sprigannaí neanta*.⁸⁴ Dinneen gives the variants *speig neannta*, *spiorad neanntóg*, *spioraid neannta*, *sprid neannta* and *sprig neannta*.⁸⁵ The Linguistic Atlas cites the form *spigneáns*, pl. *spigneánsachaí* from Inis Meáin.⁸⁶ Some of these variants raise the possibility that the first word of the phrase was originally *spiorad* (OIr *spirut*), a loan-word from Latin *spiritus* ‘spirit’. The problem with this interpretation is that the sense does not fit in with the appearance or habits of this caterpillar. I have found no references in Irish folklore to its possession of malign properties, other than irritant hairs. By contrast, another caterpillar (the larval stage of the Elephant hawk-moth, *Deilephila elpenor*) went by the name of *conach*-worm in many localities. It was mistakenly believed that this caterpillar would sting cattle in the muzzle and cause rabies (*conach*) or other serious disease.⁸⁷

3. PLANT NAMES

(a) **buachallán** /‘buəxəla:n/ ‘common ragwort, ragweed, *Senecio jacobaea*’. This is undoubtedly the most widely attested plant-name of Gaelic origin currently in use in Ireland. In spite of official pressure in favour of the English name – exemplified in the notices in Garda stations warning against the presence of this noxious weed on farmland – numerous variants of the native word have been recorded in modern speech in both Irish- and English-speaking areas, e.g. /bu:xəla:n/ (North Kerry), /buəkəla:n/ (Laois), /bu:kəla:n/ (Westmeath), /bu:kələ:n/ (Wexford), /bohəla:n/ (Roscommon), /bu:l’ə:n/ (West Wicklow), /bu:fəla:n/ (South Donegal).⁸⁸ It may be accompanied by the adj. *buí* ‘yellow’, e.g. /buəxəla:n b^wi:/ (Waterford), /buəxəla:m bi:/ (West Galway), /bōfəlan b^wI:/ (Central Donegal), /bo:əlan b^wI:/ (Tyrone).⁸⁹ From Rathlin Island, Cosslett Ó Cuinn records *boltan buidhe*.⁹⁰ From Scotland, Dwelly gives *buadhghallan*

⁸²Whitley Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Féilire Óengusso Céili Dé: The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee* (London, 1905; repr. Dublin, 1984), 146.16–17.

⁸³DIL s.v. *neantóg*; Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. *neanntóg*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v. *neantóg*.

⁸⁴Ó Curnáin, *The Irish of Iorras Aithneach*, iv, p. 2602.

⁸⁵Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. *speig*, *spiorad*, *neannta*.

⁸⁶Wagner, *Linguistic Atlas*, iii, p. 160, point 42.

⁸⁷Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, 199; Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. 2 *conach*; Ó Cuív, *Cnósach Focal ó Bhaile Bhúirne*, 66 s.v. 1 *conach*.

⁸⁸A fuller record of the Irish terms for ‘ragwort’ is available in the responses to English Questionnaire no. 974 in Heinrich Wagner, *Linguistic Atlas and Survey of Irish Dialects*, ii (Dublin, 1964; repr. 1982), iii (Dublin, 1966; repr. 1982), and in Heinrich Wagner and Colm Ó Baoill, *Linguistic Atlas and Survey of Irish Dialects*, iv (Dublin 1969; repr. 1982).

⁸⁹Gerard Stockman and Heinrich Wagner, ‘Contributions to a study of Tyrone Irish (LASI point 66)’, *Lochlann: A Review of Celtic Studies* 3 (1965), 43–236, at 58.

⁹⁰Cosslett Ó Cuinn, ‘Iarsmaí ó Oileán Reachrann’, *Éigse: A Journal of Irish Studies* 6 (1948–52) 248–56, at 253. According to Wagner and Ó Baoill, *Linguistic Atlas*, iv, point 67, no. 974, the

buidhe,⁹¹ while Allan McDonald has *buadhghalan*, *buathalan* and *buacharlan*.⁹² In *Luibhleabhrán*, Edmund Hogan and his co-authors provide a list of forms from Ireland and Scotland – referring to ragwort and other plants – which includes *bofulán*, *buachalán*, *bualán*, *buafallán*, *buafanán* and *buathbhallán*.⁹³

There have been various attempts to provide an etymology for this word. In *DIL* s.v. *búathfallán*, a connection with *búaball* ‘buffalo’ (from Latin *bubalus*) is postulated. In his *Gaelic Names of Plants* John Cameron suggests that the earlier form is *buadhghallan*, which he interprets as ‘the stripling or branch that overcomes’, taking the first element to be *buadh* (OIr *búaid*) ‘victory, attribute, virtue’.⁹⁴ In his *Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language* Alexander Macbain suggests that the word is a derivative of *buaf* ‘toad’ (from Latin *būfo*).⁹⁵ None of these explanations seems likely. I believe that the most promising theory is that of Nicholas Williams, who takes the word to be based on *bó* ‘cow’.⁹⁶ Williams suggests that it derives from an Indo-European compound **g^wou-swolos* lit. ‘cow-shriveller’, with the addition of the suffix *-án*.⁹⁷ He explains it as referring to the toxic nature of the plant to cattle and horses, particularly when eaten in dried form.

The main problem with this explanation is that there are early occurrences of the word relating to another very dissimilar plant. Thus, in a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century medical manuscript we find the following explanation: *Artemecia mater herbarum .i. in buafallan liath* ‘Artemisia, the mother of herbs, i.e. the grey *buafallán*’.⁹⁸ This refers to the much valued medical plant *Artemisia vulgaris*, known in English as ‘mugwort, wormwood’. In the fifteenth-century *Regimen na Sláinte* we find the same identification: *maille re ní ara mbeirbhear buathfallán* which corresponds to Latin *cum decoctione arthemisiae* ‘with decoction of mugwort’.⁹⁹ In her edition of the fifteenth-century Irish translation of the Latin medical tract *Rosa Anglica*, Winifred Wulff translates *buathfallán* as ‘ragweed’ in a discussion on the treatment of fevers, but the translation here should be ‘mugwort’, as the original Latin text has *artemisia*.¹⁰⁰ However, the

pronunciation is /börtəla:n b^wɪ:/.

⁹¹Dwelly, *Faclair* s.v. *buadhghallan*.

⁹²Fr Allan McDonald (ed. J. L. Campbell), *Gaelic Words and Expressions from South Uist and Eriskay*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1972; repr. Dublin, 1991), 33, 52.

⁹³Fr Edmund Hogan, John Hogan and Fr John C. MacErlean, *Luibhleabhrán: Irish and Scottish Gaelic Names of Herbs, Plants, Trees, etc.* (Dublin, 1900), 7, 9.

⁹⁴John Cameron, *Gaelic Names of Plants (Scottish and Irish)*, 1st ed. (Edinburgh and London, 1883), 42.

⁹⁵Alexander Macbain, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language*, 2nd ed. (Stirling, 1911), 55 s.v. *buadhghallan*.

⁹⁶N. J. A. Williams, ‘Some Irish plant names: 1 *buachalán*’, in D. Ó Corráin, L. Breatnach and K. McCone (eds), *Sages, Saints and Story-tellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney* (Maynooth, 1989), 449–50.

⁹⁷*IEW* i, 1045 s.v. 2 *squel*.

⁹⁸Whitley Stokes, ‘On the materia medica of the mediaeval Irish’, *RC* 9 (1888), 224–44, at 225, fol. 6b.

⁹⁹Séamus Ó Ceithearnaigh (James Carney) (ed.), *Regimen na Sláinte: Regimen Sanitatis Magnini Mediolanensis*, 3 vols (Baile Átha Cliath, 1942–4), i, p. 83, l. 2193.

¹⁰⁰Winifred Wulff (ed. and trans.), *Rosa Anglica, sev Rosa Medicinæ Johannis Anglici*, ITS 25 (London, 1929), 62.13 §14; Latin text p. 63 n. 3. The original Latin text was the work of the English

same text includes *in da buathfallan* ‘the two *buathfalláns*’ in a list of diuretic herbs: this implies that the term *búathfallán* was applied both to ragwort and mugwort already in fifteenth-century Irish.¹⁰¹

It is not easy to explain why these two plants should share the same name. Both are common herbs of medium height with multiple flower-heads and are members of the Daisy family (*Compositae*). But the dull greyish-white flowers of the mugwort are unlike the bright yellow flowers of the ragwort. Furthermore – as we have seen – the mugwort is prized for its outstanding medical properties.¹⁰² The common ragwort, by contrast, is notorious for its toxic effects on livestock. The related silver ragwort (*Senecio cineraria*) is used in homeopathy in the treatment of cataracts and conjunctivitis, but is not recommended for internal use in humans on account of its pyrrolizidine liver-toxic alkaloids.¹⁰³ Perhaps some future scholar will provide a solution to this conundrum.

(b) **ceannabhán bán** /kʰanəwːn bəːn/ ‘bog-cotton, cotton-grass, *Eriophorum angustifolium*’. The name *ceannbhán* ‘white head’ refers to the characteristic fluffy flower-heads of this sedge.¹⁰⁴ It has in the past been used to stuff pillows and as a substitute for cotton-wool during war-time scarcity, but I never heard of any references to its use in Massbrook.

(c) **copóg** /kupoːg/ ‘dock, docken, *Rumex crispus*, *Rumex obtusifolius*, etc.’. This word is applied to the various species of the genus *Rumex*, common weeds of farmland. In former times in the West of Ireland and in the Hebrides, the leaves of *copóg* were fed to cattle in the spring. Fr MacDonald quotes a verse from South Uist in which there is a reference to the feeding of *copag na h-Éill Pàdruig* ‘the docken of Saint Patrick’s Day’ to a poor stirk (*gamhain bochd*).¹⁰⁵ This practice is noted from Mayo in the 1938 Schools’ Collection,¹⁰⁶ but does not seem to have been employed in more recent times, so far as I was able to ascertain. Three types of *copóg* are distinguished in a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century glossary of plants used in medicine: *copóg coitcinn* 7 *corr copóg* 7 *samadh*.¹⁰⁷ It is likely that *copóg coitcinn* ‘common dock’ refers here to *Rumex crispus* and *corr copóg* ‘round dock’ to *Rumex obtusifolius* ‘broad-leaved

physician John of Gaddesden, who is believed to have written it in 1314.

¹⁰¹Wulff, *Rosa Anglica*, 286 §24. Wulff translates ‘the two ragweeds’, but the reference is rather to ‘two plants named *buathfallán*’ i.e. mugwort and ragweed (ragwort).

¹⁰²In the Isle of Man, sprigs of mugwort (Manx *bollan bane*) are traditionally worn on Tynwald Day (5 July) to ward off evil spirits (www.isleofman.com s.v. *bollan bane*: accessed 26 September 2024).

¹⁰³Wolfgang Hensel, *Medicinal Plants of Britain and Europe*, Black’s Nature Guides (London, 2008), 194.

¹⁰⁴Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. *ceannbhán*; Ó Dónaill, s.v. *ceannbhán*; Dwelly, *Faclair* s.v. *ceann-bàn-a’-mhonaídh*.

¹⁰⁵McDonald, *Gaelic Words and Expressions from South Uist and Eriskay*, 81.

¹⁰⁶The Schools’ Collection, vol. 0150: Lahardane N. S. p. 134.

¹⁰⁷Whitley Stokes (ed.), ‘Three Irish medical glossaries’, *ACL* i, 325–47 at 329 §118; T. K. Abbott and E. J. Gwynn, *Catalogue of the Irish Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin* (Dublin, 1921), 124, MS no. 1334.

dock'. Common sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*, OIr *samad*) was valued as a herb in medieval Ireland,¹⁰⁸ and continues to be grown or foraged in modern times for use in salads and soups. In his *Lexique étymologique*, Vendryes proposes that *cop(p)óc* is a derivative of *copp* 'cup', a borrowing from Latin *cuppa* 'cup, vessel'.¹⁰⁹ Nicholas Williams makes the suggestion that the name refers to the similarity of the leaves to the cupping-dishes used when bleeding patients for medical purposes.¹¹⁰ Another possibility is that it derives from the word *copp* with the meaning 'tuft, crest'.¹¹¹ This would apply to the tufted arrangement of the seed-bodies along the stem of the dock.

(d) **dilisc** /'dil'ɪʃk' / 'dilisk, dulse, *Palmaria palmata*'. This seaweed used to be sold in the fair at Lahardane. It has long been prized as a nutritious snack or accompaniment to a meal.¹¹² *Duilesc* is mentioned in the eighth-century law-text *Críth Gablach* as a relish (*serccol tarsainn*) which may be consumed in a commoner's diet.¹¹³ In the late eleventh-century comic tale *Aislinge Mac Con Glinne* there is a reference to a sheaf of *duilesc*, evidently hung up in the kitchen for use as flavouring when required.¹¹⁴ In a medical tract written in AD 1459 by Cormac Mac Duinn tSléibhe and another anonymous scribe, it is stated that a cure for bad breath (*brénánál*) is to chew dilisk or the inner bark of willow for nine days (*duilesc nó edarsnam soileach do cognam co cend nómaide*).¹¹⁵ In his *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum*, Standish O'Grady comments that 'this has all the appearance of being a homespun recipe', pointing out that it does not occur in the Latin medical texts *Lilium Medicinae* or *Rosa Anglicana* (= *Anglica*) which are the main source of this EModIr tract.¹¹⁶

(e) **mónóg** /'mu:nɔ:g/ 'cranberry, bogberry, *Vaccinium oxycoccus*'.¹¹⁷ This word is a derivative of *móin* 'bog'. The raising of /o:/ to /u:/ is widely attested, especially in a nasal environment; cf. *móin* > /mu:n' /,¹¹⁸ *móna* > /mu:nə/.¹¹⁹ The pronunciation of this word with /u:/ is also attested from East Galway¹²⁰

¹⁰⁸Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, 311.

¹⁰⁹LEIA C-204 s.vv. *coppóc*, 3 *copp*.

¹¹⁰N. J. A. Williams, *Díolaim Luibheanna* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1993), 40. For the medical aspects, see Pierce A. Grace, 'Therapeutic bloodletting in Ireland from the medieval period to modern times', *PRIA* 121 C (2021) 227–48.

¹¹¹DIL s.v. *copp*; LEIA C-203–04 s.v. 1 *copp*; Cecile O'Rahilly, 'Copgha, ga cop, ga cró', *Éigse: A Journal of Irish Studies* 9 (1958–61), 181–6, at 181–2.

¹¹²Kelly, *Early Irish Farming* 313.

¹¹³D. A. Binchy, (ed.) *Críth Gablach*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 11 (Dublin, 1941; repr. 2004), 6.150 = *CIH* ii 563.4; iii 779.23.

¹¹⁴Kuno Meyer (ed. and trans.), *Aislinge Meic Conglinne: The Vision of MacConglinne, a Middle-Irish Wonder Tale* (London, 1892), 89.19; Kenneth Jackson (ed.), *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* (Dublin, 1990), 35.1077.

¹¹⁵British Library [formerly British Museum] MS Harley 546, fol. 49b.

¹¹⁶Standish Hayes O'Grady, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Library* [formerly *British Museum*], i, (London, 1926), 196.

¹¹⁷Dinneen, *Foclóir*, s.vv. *mónóg*, *mónadán*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir*, s.v. *mónóg*; Dwelly, *Faclair* s.v. *monog*; E. Hogan et al., *Luibhleabhrán*, 56, s.v. *mónóg*.

¹¹⁸Ó Curnáin, *The Irish of Iorras Aithneach*, i, p. 86 §1.21.

¹¹⁹Wagner, *Linguistic Atlas*, iii, p. 376 (Sliabh na Cille, Co. Leitrim).

¹²⁰P. L. Henry, 'A linguistic survey of Ireland', 179.

and from Westmeath.¹²¹ The fruit of the cranberry ripens in September. It has a pleasant slightly sharp flavour and may be used to make jams and sauces. It is in the same genus as the more widespread *Vaccinium myrtillus*, which fruits in July and August. The latter plant goes by the English names of 'bilberry', 'whortleberry' or 'blaeberry'. The Irish word *fraochán* (also *fraochóg*) is widely attested in English-speaking areas.¹²² As far as I could discover, no form of Irish *fraochán* or *fraochóg* was to be heard in the Massbrook area in the 1960s: the English name 'bilberry' (pronounced /'bɪlbərə/) was always used. It also features in the name Bilberry Island in Lough Conn.

(f) **nóinín** /no:n'i:n'/ 'daisy, *Bellis perennis*'. The etymology of the name of this common flower is uncertain, and no explanation is put forward in Vendryes's *Léxique*.¹²³ In his *Blátha an Bhóithrin* Seán Tóibín suggests that it is a derivative of *nóin*, from Latin *nōna* (*hōra*) 'ninth hour'.¹²⁴ This term applied originally to the period corresponding to the modern 3 p.m., the time of the main meal in the medieval period. In the later language – as in English – *nóin* came to be equated with midday. Tóibín argues that the daisy does not fully open until noon. But in fact the daisy opens from dawn to dusk, so this etymology is unsatisfactory. The word *daisy* derives from OEEng *dægesege* 'day's eye', which reflects the opening of this flower at sunrise. Similarly, Medieval Latin has *solis oculus* 'the eye of the sun'. In the EModIr translation of the fourteenth-century Latin medical tract entitled *Rosa Anglica*, boiled roots of the *nó(i)nín* are said to possess pain-killing properties.¹²⁵

(g) **praiseach** /'praʃəx/ 'charlock, *Sinapis arvensis*'. This is a loan-word from Latin *brassica* 'cabbage'.¹²⁶ It has a wide range of applications in Irish: 'cabbage, charlock; vegetable stew, cereal-based porridge; confusion, mess'.¹²⁷ I noted the use of *praiseach* only with reference to charlock, a common weed of tilled land; this is also the meaning assigned to the word in the Schools' collections from the area.¹²⁸ From East Mayo, Michael Comer quotes a phrase with the use of the word in the meaning 'mess': 'He made a right *praiseach* of it'.¹²⁹

(h) **sceacha'-bush** /'ʃk' ahə 'buʃ/ 'whitethorn, hawthorn, quick, *Crataegus monogyna*'. In both Irish- and English-speaking areas, this small tree is commonly called *sceach*.¹³⁰ In Massbrook, the form seems generally to be used along

¹²¹N. J. A. Williams, 'Gaeilge na hIarmhí', 1051.

¹²²E.g. Estyn Evans, *Irish Heritage* (Dundalk, 1942), 54–5.

¹²³LEIA N-22 s.v. *nóinín* ('sans étymologie').

¹²⁴Seán Tóibín, *Blátha an Bhóithrin* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1955; eagrán nua 1965), 41–2. It is worth mentioning that my informant John Maloney told me that in local tradition the name of his farm (*Doire Nóna*, angl. Derranona) was explained as being associated with the *nóinín*.

¹²⁵Wulff, *Rosa Anglica*, 212 §67.

¹²⁶LEIA B-77 s.v. *braisech*.

¹²⁷DIL s.vv. *braisech*, *praisech*; Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. *praiseach*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v. *praiseach*.

¹²⁸E.g. The Schools' Collection, vol. 0153: An Clochar, Crossmolina p. 65 (spelled *preshock*).

¹²⁹Comer, 'As she was spoke', 144.

¹³⁰For example, in West Wicklow *sceach* /'ʃk' ak/ is still in general currency. Karen P. Corrigan notes the use of *skeagh* in Northern Ireland (*Dialects of English: Irish English*, vol. 1: *Northern Ireland*, 93 (table 4.2)).

with an English word in the compound ‘*sceacha*’-bush’. As discussed under 1(a) *fatha*’ above, words in *-ach* often lose the final /x/. The form *sceachach* is given by Dinneen as an adj. meaning ‘thorny, full of thorns’, and also as a noun ‘thorn-thicket or bush’.¹³¹ I take Massbrook *sceacha*’ to be a noun. Similarly, P. L. Henry notes the occurrence of the noun *sceachach* /ʃkahəx, ʃkahə/ ‘bush’ employed in the English of Balla, Co. Mayo.¹³²

(i) **súileachaí buí** /ˈsu:l̪ˠəxiː ˈbʷiː/ ‘corn marigold, *Chrysanthemum segetum*’. The usual form of the name for this weed of cereal-crops is *súile buí* lit. ‘yellow eyes’. In his *Foclóir* Dinneen explains *súil bhuidhe* as ‘the blossom of certain weeds common among potatoes’, and quotes from Co. Donegal the expression *mí na súl mbuidhe* ‘the month of the yellow eyes’, referring to July.¹³³ The plural *súileachaí* shows the ending in *-(e)achaí* commonly employed with nouns of all declensions in Connacht dialects.¹³⁴

(j) **yew-fiug** /ˈjuː ˈfʷug/ ‘bog yew (?)’. I have no satisfactory explanation for this term, and am unsure as to whether the elements are Irish or English. I am confident that my transcription is exactly as pronounced by my informant John Maloney. He owned a stretch of bog near the shore of Lough Conn and told me that three useful types of wood are to be found in bogs in this area.¹³⁵ The most common is ‘bog-pine’, i.e. preserved trunks and roots of Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*).¹³⁶ Such trunks served many purposes in the domestic economy. Thin slats of bog-pine were employed to hold up the *scraw* roofing of thatched cottages (see under 5(e) *scráith* below), and were also used in the manufacture of spills to light fires or to serve as torches. Larger sections were used to make chairs, beds, doors, shafts for carts, ridge-beams, etc.¹³⁷ Even more prized was the black ‘bog-oak’, wood of hard quality which could be carved to make pipes and various items of furniture. The third type of wood was called ‘yew-fiug’, a term which does not seem to be attested elsewhere. The word *fiug* may be Irish *fíodh* ‘wood’, and *yew* is most likely to be identified as the English tree-name.¹³⁸ The yew (*Taxus baccata*) is now infrequent in the Irish countryside, and is mainly to be found in churchyards and great estates. In earlier times it was more common, and features in the name *Mag Éo*

¹³¹Dinneen, *Foclóir*, s.v. *sceachach*.

¹³²P. L. Henry, ‘A linguistic survey of Ireland’, 178 §82.

¹³³Dinneen, *Foclóir*, s.v. *súil*.

¹³⁴Tomás de Bhaldraithe, *Gaeilge Chois Fhairrge: An Deilbhíocht* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1953), 43 §100; Ó Curnáin, *The Irish of Iorras Aithneach*, ii, 712–13 §4.59.

¹³⁵For information on wood preserved in bogs I am grateful to Michael O’Connell, Professor Emeritus at the School of Botany, NUI Galway. See also A. T. Lucas, ‘Bog wood: a study in rural economy’, *Béaloides: The Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society* 23 (1954), 71–134.

¹³⁶For the botanical perspective, see Michael O’Connell, ‘Bog-deal in Co. Clare, with particular reference to bog-pine and its significance’, *The Other Clare: Journal of the Shannon Archaeological and Historical Society* 46 (2022), 9–17.

¹³⁷Seán mac Giollarnáth (ed.), *Peadar Chois Fhairrge* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1934; athchló 1939), 73–4 s.v. *trosgán giúsaighe* [furniture from bog-pine]; Tomás Ó Máille, *An Béal Beó* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1936), 54; Estyn Evans, *Irish Heritage*, 40, 63, 70, 122.

¹³⁸It could conceivably be a reflex of Ir. *iubhar* ‘yew’ (Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. *iubhar*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v. *iúr*; DIL s.v. *ibar*).

'the plain of the yew-trees', a place-name originally limited to an area in East Mayo, but subsequently applied to the whole county.¹³⁹ In the present time, the only extensive stands of yew-trees in native Irish woodland are on limestone pavement at Reenadinna, Killarney, Co. Kerry.¹⁴⁰ Yew-wood preserved in bogs is notable for its hardness and attractive colour.

4. FARMING, ETC.

(a) **banbh** /'banu:/ 'piglet'; plur. /'banəvz/; dimin. *bainbhín* /'ban'əv'i:n/ 'little piglet'. The pronunciation /'banu:/ is general throughout Connacht, whereas Munster has /'banəv/. The usual term in North Donegal is *pigin* /'pig'i:n/ from English *pig*.¹⁴¹

(b) **bó brada** /'bo:'bradə/ 'thieving cow'.¹⁴² This expression was employed humorously by Patrick Maloney of a person who awkwardly climbed over the pews during Mass in the manner of a cow breaking through a fence. In his word-list from Began, Co. Mayo, Michael Comer cites the adj. *bradach* 'thieving (referring to a cow)', and gives the example 'the *bradach* cow is in the corn'.¹⁴³ Stiofán Ó hAnnracháin records a similar expression used in North Kerry of a cow which breaks into corn-fields: 'A *bradaí* cow, bó a bhriseann isteach i ngarraithe arúir, etc.'¹⁴⁴ The same form was recorded by Nioclás Breathnach in the English of Newcastle, Co. Limerick, to describe a thieving cow: 'she's a *braidí* cow .i. bó a bhíos ag bradáil'.¹⁴⁵

(c) **cipín** /'k'ip'in/ 'twig'. ModIr *cipín* is a diminutive of *ceap* 'block, stump' (OIr *cepp*) and is widely employed of twigs picked up as kindling for domestic fires. The pronunciation of this word with short *-in* rather than *-ín* is noted by Michael Comer in his account of traces of Irish in Began, Co. Mayo: 'get some *cipíns* for the fire!'.¹⁴⁶ In his study of North Roscommon, P. L. Henry records both /'k'ip'i-n/ and /'k'ipən/.¹⁴⁷

In general, the diminutive suffix *-ín* is well preserved in Irish vocabulary in Massbrook, e.g. 4(a) *bainbhín* 'little piglet', 5(a) *bóithrín* 'small road', 6(b)

¹³⁹Edmund Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum* (Dublin, 1910), 519 s.v. 1 *Mag n-eo*.

¹⁴⁰John Cross and Deirdre Lynn, 'Results of a monitoring survey of yew woodland', *Irish Wildlife Manuals* 72 (National Parks and Wildlife Service, Dublin, 2013) 1–26, at 15. For discussion of the evidence of widespread prehistoric yew-dominated woodland see John Feehan and Grace O'Donovan, *The Bogs of Ireland* (Dublin, 1996), 439–40; Michael O'Connell and Karen Molloy, 'Mid- and late-Holocene environmental change in western Ireland: new evidence from coastal peats and fossil timbers with particular reference to relative sea-level change', *The Holocene* 27 (2017), 1825–45.

¹⁴¹Wagner, *Linguistic Atlas*, i, p. 32.

¹⁴²Note the lack of lenition after the fem. noun *bó*.

¹⁴³Comer, 'As she was spoke', 140 s.v. *bradach*.

¹⁴⁴Stiofán Ó hAnnracháin, *Caint an Bhaile Dhuibh* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1964), 39.

¹⁴⁵Nioclás Breathnach, 'Focail Ghaeilge atá le clos sa Bhéarla a labhartar i gceanntar an Chaisleáin Nua, Co. Luimní', *Éigse: A Journal of Irish Studies* 6 (1948–52), 169–79, at 170.

¹⁴⁶Comer, 'As she was spoke', 141.

¹⁴⁷P. L. Henry, *An Anglo-Irish Dialect of North Roscommon* (Dublin, 1957), 58 §63; 66 §77; 82 §108; Index, p. 217.

boisín ‘what can be enclosed in the palm of the hand’. This suffix is also widely employed in English words, e.g. *daigín* ‘little dog’, *lave-in* ‘small leaf’, *mainín* ‘little man’.

(d) **dorú** /dəˈruː/ ‘fishing line’. This word is a borrowing from ONorse *dorg*, and is well-attested in Irish and Scottish Gaelic in the meanings ‘fishing line, measuring line’.¹⁴⁸ I recorded this word as a disyllable with stress on the second syllable: see discussion on 1(e) *pruthóg* above. In his *Irish of Iorras Aithneach* Brian Ó Curnáin notes the alternation in this Co. Galway dialect between /dorú:/ and /dru:/, and also records an intermediate form /dʰru:/.¹⁴⁹ In his *Irish of Erris*, Éamonn Mhac an Fhailigh records the monosyllable /dru:/.¹⁵⁰

(e) **láighe** /la:iː/ ‘spade’. The final /i/ is definitely a long vowel in Massbrook. In his *Irish of Erris*, Éamonn Mhac an Fhailigh identifies a hiatus between the two vowels in this word, and transcribes it as /La:-i:/.¹⁵¹ In his *Irish of Tourmeakedy*, on the other hand, Seán de Búrca represents it with a short final vowel /La:jə/.¹⁵² In his *Irish of Iorras Aithneach* Brian Ó Curnáin draws attention to the diphthongisation of this word by some speakers born later than the 1940s, whereby the traditional pronunciation /la:iː/ was simplified to /lai/.¹⁵³

(f) **liú** /l’uː/ ‘to bawl, bellow’. This verb is used especially of cattle, but may also be applied to a crying child. The Indo-European root is **lē-* ‘to cry, wail’.¹⁵⁴ In the early language the verb *liid* (vn *liud*) is mainly attested in the sense of ‘accuses, charges, calls out’.¹⁵⁵ Examples are common in legal material, e.g. *fer fora llither forcraid n-étraid* ‘a man who is accused of excess of lust’.¹⁵⁶ The original meaning ‘to cry’ is well-attested in ModIr.¹⁵⁷

(g) **meitheal** /m’ehəl/ ‘group for co-operative farm-work’. This term is well attested in the early language with reference to groups of workers engaged together in activities such as harvesting or turf-cutting.¹⁵⁸ A seventh-century law-text on distraint lays down fines for those who fail to provide labour for their lord’s harvest: the offence is defined as *meth methle gíallna* ‘failure to join the reaping party of base clientship’.¹⁵⁹

¹⁴⁸ Carl Marstrander, *Bidrag til det Norske Sprogs Historie i Irland* (Kristiania, 1915), 93; *DIL* s.v. *doruba*; Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. *dorugha*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v. *dorú*; Dwelly, *Faclair* s.v. *dorgh*.

¹⁴⁹ Ó Curnáin, *The Irish of Iorras Aithneach*, i, 268 §1.241.

¹⁵⁰ Mhac an Fhailigh, *The Irish of Erris*, 140 §312. T. J. Lavin, ‘Notes on the Irish of East Mayo 2’, *Éigse: A Journal of Irish Studies* 9 (1958–61), 10–17, at 16 §3, likewise has /dru:/.

¹⁵¹ Mhac an Fhailigh, *The Irish of Erris*, 60 §261.

¹⁵² de Búrca, *The Irish of Tourmeakedy*, 32 §158.

¹⁵³ Ó Curnáin, *The Irish of Iorras Aithneach*, i, 89 §1.23.

¹⁵⁴ *IEW* i, 650 s.v. 1 *lā-*, *lē*.

¹⁵⁵ *DIL* s.v. *liid*.

¹⁵⁶ D. A. Binchy (ed. and trans.), ‘*Bretha Crólige*’, *Ériu* 12 (1938), 24 §29 = *CIH* vi 2294.9–10.

¹⁵⁷ Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. *liúghaim*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v. *liúigh*.

¹⁵⁸ *DIL* s.v. *meithel*; *LEIA* M-45 s.v. *methel*. The word is cognate with Welsh *medel* ‘reaping party’ (*GPC* s.v.).

¹⁵⁹ *CIH* ii 382.20–21. See Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, 238.

The word is widely attested in ModIr dialects.¹⁶⁰ In Massbrook of the 1960s, the custom of co-operative farming – particularly between related families – was widely employed. However, the only record I obtained of the use of the word *meitheal* was in connection with the farming practices of bygone times.

(h) **scolb** /'skaləp/ 'withe (for thatching)'. The final labial is always unvoiced: this is reflected in the common anglicised spellings *scollop* or *scallop*.¹⁶¹

(i) **searra** /'farə/ 'colt'.¹⁶² The word *serrach* was employed as a young man's nickname, in the sense of 'lively lad'.

(j) **soc** /sok/ 'ploughshare'. It is sometimes the case that an Irish word retained in English speech is only employed with a single meaning whereas multiple meanings are attached to the original Irish form (cf. discussion on 5(g) *sraith* below). In Massbrook I noted *soc* used only of the point of a plough. In ModIr and ScG dictionaries, on the other hand – in addition to 'ploughshare' – it is attested with the meanings 'point or projection of an implement, iron lever', 'muzzle (of a gun)', 'snout (of pig or dog)', 'beak (of bird)', 'pout, expression of annoyance'.¹⁶³ This word goes back to IE **sukko-* 'pig' and is cognate with Welsh *hwch* 'pig, sow'.¹⁶⁴ The etymology reflects the similarity between the rooting of a pig and the action of a ploughshare when ploughing up the soil.¹⁶⁵

(k) **súgán** /'su:ga:n/ 'straw-rope'.¹⁶⁶ Traditions regarding the manufacture of ropes made by twisting corn-stalks together were often mentioned. One Massbrook story concerned the use of a *súgán* rope to let a man down a cliff to destroy the last nest of the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaëtos*) in the locality. The eagles were alleged to consume a lamb each day.

5. LANDSCAPE

(a) **bóithrín** /'bo:hr'i:n/ 'small road'. This word is a diminutive of *bóthar* 'cattle-track, road', and is employed in Massbrook of a minor road, generally untarred. The anglicised spelling is *boreen*. The term *bóthar* is well-attested in the early language, but the diminutive is not recorded.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁰E.g. Mhac an Fhailigh, *The Irish of Erris*, 13 §44; de Búrca, *The Irish of Tourmakeady*, 118 §425; Comer, 'As she was spoke', 143; Henry, *An Anglo-Irish Dialect of North Roscommon*, 47 §48; Ó hAnnracháin, *Caint an Bhaile Duibh*, 71; Ó Curnáin, *The Irish of Iorras Aithneach*, iv, Index, p. 2543 s.v. *meitheal*.

¹⁶¹Estyn Evans, *Irish Heritage*, 64–5.

¹⁶²Dinneen, *Foclóir s.v. searrach*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir s.v. searrach*; *DIL* s.v. *serrach*; *LEIA* S-95–6 s.v. *serrach*.

¹⁶³Dinneen, *Foclóir s.v. soc*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir s.v. soc*; Dwelly, *Faclair s.v. soc*; cf. *DIL* s.v. *soc*.

¹⁶⁴*LEIA* S-158–9 s.v. *socc*. Vendryes notes here that ModFr *soc* 'ploughshare' is of Gaulish origin, and therefore cognate with ModIr *soc*; cf. Lambert, *La Langue Gauloise: Description linguistique, commentaire d'inscriptions choisies*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 2003), 201.

¹⁶⁵Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, 469–70.

¹⁶⁶Dinneen, *Foclóir s.v. súgán*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir s.v. súgán*; *DIL* s.vv. *súag*, *súagán*; *LEIA* S-195 s.v. *súag*.

¹⁶⁷*DIL* s.v. *bóthar*; *LEIA* B-74 s.v. *bóthar*.

(b) **crocán** /'kruka:n/ 'small hill', diminutive of *cnoc* (*croc*) 'hill'.¹⁶⁸ In his *Irish Dialects Past and Present* Thomas F. O'Rahilly discusses the development of original *cn-* to *cr-* in the Northern half of Ireland, as well as in Scotland and the Isle of Man.¹⁶⁹ He points out that in the spelling of place-names the anglicised form *Crock-* is occasionally attested for *cnoc*, mainly in Ulster. However, in the majority of place-names throughout Ireland the anglicised form is *Knock-*, pronounced /nok/. This is the case in the name of the townland of Ballyknock /'bali: 'nok/ (*Baile an Chnoic* 'the town of the hill') to the south-west of Lough Levalley and adjacent to Massbrook Upper.

(c) **lochán** /'luxa:n/ 'small lake'.

(d) **sceilp** /'k'elp/ 'cliff'; also 'blow' (with hand or stick).

(e) **scraith** /skra:/ 'upper sod'.¹⁷⁰ The noun *scraw* is applied to the top layer of soil and vegetation on rough or boggy land. In traditional farming, *scraws* had a wide range of uses. They were employed in the roofing of sheds and dwelling-houses, and in the process of lime-extraction in lime-kilns.¹⁷¹ A derivative verb 'to *scraw*' was employed in relation to the peeling back of the top layer of soil preparatory to the planting of potatoes. In an account of potato-planting on poor land, a pupil at Lahardane National School named Bridgie Tolan records that 'they *scraw* the *shough* in on the ridge'.¹⁷²

In the earlier language, the feminine noun *scraith* is used of sods of earth, especially in relation to human burial, e.g. *gan tuamba gan sgrath* 'without tomb, without covering of sods'.¹⁷³ It is also attested of a scab on a wound or sore, and of the decaying crust on a rusty iron implement. The etymology of the word is uncertain: *DIL* suggests a connection with *sraith*.¹⁷⁴ A denominative verb is not attested in the early language.

(f) **seoch** /sux/ 'furrow, excavation'. The origin of the Irish word *seoch* is unclear. In Ireland it is mainly recorded from Ulster (angl. *shough* or *sheugh*), and is applied to drains dug between fields. As we have seen in the previous entry, the term is also applied to the furrow between potato-ridges.¹⁷⁵ Similar meanings are recorded for Lowland Scots *sheuch* and it is possible that the word originated in Scotland and came to Ireland with the Ulster Plantations. As far as I was able to ascertain, in this part of Mayo the word is attested only

¹⁶⁸Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. *cnocán*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v. *cnocán*.

¹⁶⁹Thomas F. O'Rahilly, *Irish Dialects Past and Present, with Chapters on Scottish and Manx* (Dublin, 1932; revised ed. 1972; repr. 1988), 22–3.

¹⁷⁰Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. *scraith*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v. 1 *scraith*; Dwelly, *Faclair* s.v. 1 *sgrath*.

¹⁷¹The Schools' Collection, vol. 0120: Turlough N. S. pp. 175–6.

¹⁷²The Schools' Collection, vol. 0150: Lahardane N. S. p. 130. A denominative verb is attested in ModIr and ScG: Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. *scraithim*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v. 2 *scraith*; Dwelly, *Faclair* s.v. 2 *sgrath*.

¹⁷³John O'Daly (ed.) *The Poets and Poetry of Munster*, ii, (Dublin, 1849), 152.20.

¹⁷⁴*DIL* s.v. *scraith*.

¹⁷⁵Estyn Evans, *Irish Heritage*, 90.

in relation to the growing of potatoes.¹⁷⁶ For an excavation dug between fields, English ‘drain’ is the normal term. The word ‘ditch’ is applied to the stones and soil which have been dug up to form a field boundary, often reinforced with whitethorns (*sceacha*-bushes). According to local tradition, a ghost cannot cross a ‘mearing drain’, i.e. the boundary between two properties.

(g) **sraith** /ʃra/ ‘layer of vegetation on top of water’. The ModIr noun *sraith* (OI *srath*) has a wide variety of applications: ‘layer, row, series, rank, course’.¹⁷⁷ In Massbrook it is used a layer of moss and other vegetation growing over water, particularly on top of a quaking bog.

6. PEOPLE: CHARACTERISTICS, AILMENTS, ETC.

(a) **amadán** /‘aməðɑ:n/ ‘male fool’.

(b) **boisín** /‘buʃi:n/ ‘small palm, what can be enclosed in the palm of the hand’.¹⁷⁸ This word is a diminutive of *bas* ‘palm of the hand’.

(c) **cailleach** /‘kal’əx/ ‘bed-enclosure near fire where the old woman (*cailleach*) sleeps’.¹⁷⁹

(d) **draoib** /dri:b/ ‘mud, spatter’. This word is well attested in ModIr, but is not recorded in the earlier language.¹⁸⁰ It is employed in the context of a person coming into a house in a wet and mucky state: ‘I am *draoibed*’.

(e) **gasúr** /‘gasu:r/ ‘boy, child’. This word originated as a borrowing from Anglo-Norman *garçon* ‘boy, lad’.¹⁸¹ In Massbrook it was used especially in the context of attendance at school, with the expression ‘school-*gasúrs*’ being applied to both boys and girls. In his *Irish Dialects Past and Present* T. F. O’Rahilly drew attention to the distribution of the forms taken by *garçon* in Irish.¹⁸² In the northern part of the country the forms are *gasúr* or *gasún* whereas in the southern part it is *garsún*. Massbrook has *gasúr*, as in other Mayo dialects and in Conamara.¹⁸³ The form *gasún* is attested from Westmeath,¹⁸⁴ Roscommon¹⁸⁵ and from Glenamaddy (north-east Galway).¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁶The Schools’ Collection, vol. 0150: Lahardane N. S. pp. 123–4, 126, 128–30.

¹⁷⁷Dinneen, *Foclóir s.v. sraith*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir s.v. sraith*; *DIL s.v. srath*.

¹⁷⁸Dinneen, *Foclóir s.v. baisín*.

¹⁷⁹Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir s.v. cailleach* (9); Stockman, *The Irish of Achill*, 363, s.v. *cailleach* (iv).

¹⁸⁰Dinneen, *Foclóir s.v. drib*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir s.v. draoib*.

¹⁸¹*SnaG* 442 §11.3 (5).

¹⁸²O’Rahilly, *Irish Dialects Past and Present*, 241.

¹⁸³Mhac an Fhailigh, *The Irish of Erris*, 57 §253; de Búrca, *The Irish of Tourmakeady*, 76 §377; Tomás de Bhaldraithe, *Gaeilge Chois Fhairrge: An Deilbhíocht*, 344; Ó Curnáin, *The Irish of Iorras Aithneach*, i, 273 §1.246.

¹⁸⁴Mhac an Fhailigh, ‘A Westmeath word-list’, 261.

¹⁸⁵P. L. Henry, *An Anglo-Irish Dialect of North Roscommon*, 58 §64; 61 §71.

¹⁸⁶P. L. Henry, ‘A linguistic survey of Ireland’, 179 §83.

(f) **girseach** /'g'irʃəx/. I noted *girseach* 'young girl' with final *-ch*.¹⁸⁷

(g) **grá** /gra:/ 'love, special affection'.

(h) **meas** /m'as/ 'respect'.

(i) **oighreach** /'air'əx/ 'chilblains'. I noted this form used of skin-irritation – especially of the shins – allegedly caused by going too near to the fire after coming in from the cold. In the 1938 Schools' collection, a pupil named Phyllis Kelly at An Clochar National School, Crossmolina, Co. Mayo, refers to the use of *troighíní* 'leggings' – manufactured from old stockings – to protect the housewife from '*irioch*', a spelling which could represent an initial diphthong or a long vowel /i:/.¹⁸⁸ I recorded the word as having an initial diphthong /ai/ in Massbrook. In his *Irish of Tourmakeady*, Seán de Búrca records an initial diphthong /əir'ux/,¹⁸⁹ as does Gerard Stockman in his *Irish of Achill* (/ěir'ax/).¹⁹⁰ The pronunciation /i:rəx/ is attested from Co. Westmeath,¹⁹¹ and /e:rə/ is recorded from Kilclare, Co. Leitrim.¹⁹²

Dinneen provides the translation 'chafing, heat of the skin, eczema' and Ó Dónaill has 'sores from cold or chafing'.¹⁹³ There are no entries for *aigrech* (or *oigrech*) in dictionaries of the early language.¹⁹⁴ The word presumably derives from OIr *aig* 'ice',¹⁹⁵ which is commonly attested with the collective suffix *aigred* (later *oighreadh*) 'ice, frozen snow'.¹⁹⁶

(j) **óinseach** /'o:nʃəx/ 'female fool'. P. L. Henry records /'o:nʃə/ for North Roscommon.¹⁹⁷

(k) **slámóg** /'ʃla:mo:g/ 'lazy untidy woman'. This derogatory term derives from the noun *slám* 'lock, flake, handful of wool, hay, etc.', a lengthened form of *slam* 'anything soft, heavy or clumsy'.¹⁹⁸ P. L. Henry notes the occurrence of the form *sláimín* used in North Roscommon of an untidy person of either sex.¹⁹⁹

¹⁸⁷Dinneen, *Foclóir s.v. geirreach*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir s.v. girseach*; Wagner, *Linguistic Atlas*, i, p. 200. s.v. *giorsach*.

¹⁸⁸The Schools' Collection, vol. 0153: An Clochar N. S., Crossmolina, Co. Mayo, p. 63.

¹⁸⁹De Búrca, *The Irish of Tourmakeady*, 45 §243 s.v. *oighreach*.

¹⁹⁰Stockman, *The Irish of Achill*, 377 s.v. *oighreach*.

¹⁹¹Mhac an Fhailigh, 'A Westmeath word-list', 263 s.v. *oighreach* /i:rex/; Williams, 'Gaeilge na hIarmhí', 1051 s.v. *oighreach* /i:rəx/. Williams notes that the pronunciation /e:rə/ is also indicated for Westmeath with the spelling *éara*.

¹⁹²Henry, 'A linguistic survey of Ireland', 176 §80.

¹⁹³Dinneen, *Foclóir s.v. oighreach*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir s.v. oighreach*.

¹⁹⁴There are no entries in *DIL* or in Kuno Meyer, *Contributions to Irish Lexicography A-C* (Halle, 1906).

¹⁹⁵*DIL* s.v. 1 *aig*.

¹⁹⁶*DIL* s.v. *aigred*; Dinneen, *Foclóir s.v. oighear*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir s.v. oighear*.

¹⁹⁷Henry, *An Anglo-Irish dialect of North Roscommon*, 46 §46; 94 §133.

¹⁹⁸Dinneen, *Foclóir s.v. slam, slám*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir s.v. slám*; *DIL* s.v. *slamm*.

¹⁹⁹Henry, *An Anglo-Irish dialect of North Roscommon*, 62 §72, 92 §132; Index p. 231.

7. MISCELLANEOUS

(a) **as go brách** /'as gə 'brɑ:x/ 'away with, off with'. This phrase was employed by Anthony Kenny in the context of a wheel coming off a cart. From North Kerry Stiofán Ó hAnnracháin notes the phrases '*as go bráth* with you now', and '*as go bráth* with him down the road'.²⁰⁰

(b) **húrla-hárta** /'hu:rlə 'hɑ:rlə/ 'commotion'. Irish dialects provide a great variety of informal or slang expressions for 'commotion, disturbance, hullabaloo'. Often, such forms begin with *h-* and display variation in the vowel, as in the present example. Dinneen provides the translation 'confusion' for *hulach* *halach* and *hulam* *halam*, and Ó Curnáin lists *holcam* *halcam* 'voracious eating', *húirt háirt* 'hubbub', and *húrta harta* 'commotion' in his Index.²⁰¹ Dinneen quotes the use of *húrla* and *hárta* as separate nouns in the North Connacht expression *gan húrla gan hárta* 'without anything at all'.²⁰² Compare also *hurla-má-ghiúnga* /'hu:rlə mɑ: 'ju:ŋgə/ used in Ballyvourney of a physical contention or tussle.²⁰³

(c) **rúcam-rácam** /ru:kəm 'rɑ:kəm/ 'hullabaloo'. Ó Donaill gives *rúcam* as a variant of *rúcail* 'commotion, wrangling'.²⁰⁴ Compare the common expression *ruaille buaille* (*ruille búille*) 'tumult, rough-and-tumble, ruction'.²⁰⁵

GENERAL COMMENTS

I conclude with a few general comments on the material. It will be obvious that the Irish terms recorded in the above list belong to a number of different categories. Some are common words, frequently employed in general conversation. These include words such as *gasúr* 'child', which – when applied to males – seems generally to be used of a younger age-group than English *boy*. Another common word is *bóithrín* which no doubt survives because it fills a semantic gap between the English words *road* and *lane*. As in many other parts of Ireland, *grá* is retained because it has connotations of 'a special or intense affection' which is not present in English *love*. There are also cases where there seems to be no discernible difference of meaning between the Irish word and its English equivalent. Thus, it is not apparent that there is any difference in meaning between Ir. *meas* and Eng. *respect* or between Ir. *amadán* and Eng. *fool*, *idiot*. Similarly, so far as I was able to discern, the Irish term *liú* – when applied to cattle – corresponds closely in meaning to Eng. *bellow*.

²⁰⁰ Stiofán Ó hAnnracháin, *Caint an Bhaile Dhuibh*, 35 s.v. *as go bráth*.

²⁰¹ Ó Curnáin, *The Irish of Iorras Aithneach*, iv, 2512.

²⁰² Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. *húrla*.

²⁰³ Ó Cuív, *Cnósach Focal ó Bhaile Bhúirne*, 134.

²⁰⁴ Ó Donaill, *Foclóir* s.v. *rúcail*.

²⁰⁵ Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. *ruaille buaille*; Ó Donaill, *Foclóir* s.v. *ruaille*.

Specialised Vocabulary

A considerable proportion of the Irish words which survived in the 1960s belonged to specialised areas of vocabulary – and some of them continue in use to this day. As we have seen, *scráith* is employed of the top layer of soil and vegetation on rough land, and had numerous uses in traditional husbandry. The English words *sod* or *sward* do not adequately reflect the meaning of *scráith* so it was necessary to retain this word. Similarly, there is no single word in Standard English which corresponds to Ir. *sraith* ‘layer of vegetation on top of water’, so this word was also retained.

Many of the surviving Irish words refer to animals and plants. This situation is mirrored in many other countries where a dominant language has pushed out another language or languages. Most of what is now France would have been Celtic-speaking in the first few centuries AD, but very little Celtic vocabulary survived into Modern French. The few exceptions include names for plants such as *berle* ‘water-cress’²⁰⁶ and dialectal *verne* ‘alder-tree’.²⁰⁷ Similarly, the native American languages of North America have contributed little to the general vocabulary of the dominant languages English, Spanish and French. However, widely used plant-names of native American origin are *squash*, *tomato* and *camassia*. The animal-names *moose*, *skunk*, *coyote* and *raccoon* likewise originate in native American languages.

In the case of Irish animal- and plant-names, there has been considerable variation in the extent of their use. Thus, *buachallán* has held its own over much of the country in spite of official pressure in favour of the English word *ragwort* (or *ragweed*), which regularly appears in notices warning land-owners against infestations of noxious weeds. In Massbrook *buachallán* was the normal term, though *ragweed* was also recognised. Likewise, the normal term for the genus *Rumex* was *copóg*, but *dock* (or *docken*) was recognised as an equivalent. The Irish word *seabhac* and its English equivalent *hawk* seemed to co-exist in speech. On the other hand, *banbh* was always employed of a ‘young pig’, never English *piglet*. Similarly, *mónóg* was the only word employed for the bog-plant *Vaccinium oxycoccus*: the English words *cranberry* or *bogberry* were not in use. In the insect world, *spide neansaí* was the only term used for ‘caterpillar’, and *creabhar* alone served as the term for various biting flies referred to in English as *horse-fly* or *cleg*.

Folk-tales and Seanchas

Some of the words in the above lists were recorded only in the context of tales and lore relating to past events and practices. Thus, the term *riabhach* ‘brindled’ was not in general use in relation to the colour of cattle, but only in the context of the three ‘*riabhach*-days’ of bad weather traditionally held to occur in early April (1(f) above). Likewise, the terms *coisí deasa* and *preaba’ poll* for ‘hare’ and ‘rabbit’ were not in general currency, but were mentioned in a discussion on the hunting practices of the locality in bygone times.

²⁰⁶ LELA B-52 s.v. *biror*; Lambert, *La Langue Gauloise*, 190 s.v. *berle*.

²⁰⁷ VKG i, 156 §96; IEW i, 1169; Lambert, *La Langue Gauloise*, 203 s.v. *vergne*, *verne*.

Possible influence from Irish taught in the Schools

Three of my informants – Anthony Kenny, Patrick Earley and Anthony Moran – attended Massbrook National School before the general introduction of the Irish language as a school-subject in 1924. All the other informants learnt Irish at school, but I noted no case where there was any likelihood that terms in the above lists originated from the schoolroom. Indeed, it was often emphasised to me that ‘School Irish’ differed greatly from (and was inferior to) the traditional Irish of the locality, as spoken by previous generations.

Words of uncertain origin

In some cases it is uncertain whether a word is of Irish or English origin. For example, the term *lock* is commonly applied in Massbrook to an armful of substances such as turf or hay. In his ‘Westmeath word-list’, Éamonn Mhac an Fhailigh suggests that it is the Irish word *glac* ‘small amount’, comparing the Mayo expression *glac fhataí* ‘an armful of potatoes’.²⁰⁸ But it is more likely that it is English *lock*, explained in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as ‘a (small) quantity of hay, straw, etc.; a handful, an armful (now only employed in dialect)’.²⁰⁹ In his article ‘As she was spoke’, Michael Comer treats *bóltraí* ‘elderberry tree’ as an Irish word, and quotes the phrase ‘Do not beat the cow with a *bóltraí* stick’.²¹⁰ In fact, the word *bóltraí* is English *bour-tree* – an alternative name for the elder (*Sambucus nigra*) – with substitution of *-l-* for *-r-*. The word is attested in a variety of forms in English, Hiberno-English and Scots.²¹¹ I noted the form /’bo:r,tri:/ in Massbrook. As suggested above (3(j)), the term *yew-fiug* may contain the English word *yew*, possibly combined with Irish *fíodh* ‘wood’.

Another case is worth mentioning because it features in a folk-tale which was recorded in the 1938 Schools’ Collection and was still current in the 1960s.²¹² The tale involved a king named O’Brien who was married to Queen Bess ‘many hundred years ago’. O’Brien had originally lived in Ulster, but had been expelled to the province of Connacht. One day he went out hunting. In his absence, three men appeared at the queen’s castle at Terrybawn by the shore of Lough Conn, and asked where her husband was. She said that he had gone out hunting on the mountain. The men pursued him and cut off his head. They returned to the castle, and ordered the queen to go with them. She refused, and fled to a cliff at the edge of Lough Conn. Before she jumped to her death, she threw her ring into the lake. From that day, this cliff is called *Ring Bess*. This tale is reminiscent of the prose and verse *Dindshenchas* ‘place-lore’

²⁰⁸Mhac an Fhailigh, ‘A Westmeath word-list’, *Éigse: A Journal of Irish Studies* 5 (1945–7), 256–66, at 261 s.v. *glac.

²⁰⁹William Little, H. W. Fowler and J. Coulson (eds), *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed. revised by C. T. Onions (Oxford, 1965), s.v. *lock* (3).

²¹⁰Comer, ‘As she was spoke’, 140.

²¹¹Little, Fowler and Coulson, *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* s.v. *bourtree*; William Craigie (ed.), *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* (Chicago, 1931–7; 2nd impression 1974), s.v. *bourtré*.

²¹²The Schools’ Collection, vol. 0149: Massbrook N. S. pp. 317–19. The tale was written down by Lily Mulhern, who recorded that she obtained it from Mrs Conroy of Terryduff.

of the Mlr period, in which place-names are explained with reference to a past incident.²¹³ In this instance, both *ring* and *Bess* appear to be regarded as English words, though employed in Irish word-order, i.e. *ring Bess* = ‘Bess’s ring’. Possibly, *ring* was originally Irish *rinn* ‘promontory’.²¹⁴

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²¹³Many examples are to be found in *MD* i–iv, and in Whitley Stokes, ‘The prose tales in the Rennes Dindshenchas’, *RC* 15 (1894), 272–336, 418–84; *RC* 16 (1895), 31–83.

²¹⁴Dinneen, *Foclóir* s.v. *rinn*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir* s.v. *rinn*; *DIL* s.v. 1 *rind* (c); Hogan, *Onomasticon*, 581–2 s.v. *rinn*. Another tale involving this place-name is recorded by the Massbrook pupil Charles Kelly: ‘about a hundred years ago there was the chimney of a castle seen in the waters of Lough Conn at Rinn bess point’ (The Schools’ Collection, vol. 0149: Massbrook N. S. p. 374).