

Annála Clainne Aodhagáin

Annals of the Clan Egan

A.D. 1235

W silt fraranach me abouc dohecc
In hano

Dois 1317

Dois cruic mla cricho aoech, aseacha

U cel 1081 mto me aobacchm rau ep ibfengcj 7 mbrfcmj oee
7 2 as null maz puz null caof mrcno heolus oo 5 abal ibfoll
7 caofech oo oenam oo 5 pjt maz puz null puz onao

by Conor Mac Hale

I gcuimhne Fhlainn Mhic Aodhagáin (+1643) agus
an Dubhaltaigh Mhic Fhirbhisigh (+1671), oidí
clúmhaire agus scoláirí léanta iad araon, san
seanchas agus i bhféineachas na hÉireann,
agus
san léinn dúchasach i gcoitinne.

In memory of Flann Mac Egan (+1643) and
Duald Mac Firis (+1671), both of them
famous teachers and learned scholars in the
History and in the Brehon Laws of Ireland,
and
in native learning in general.

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ANNALS OF THE CLAN EGAN

By

Conor Mac Hale

An Account of the
Mac Egan Bardic Family
of
Brehon Lawyers

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Preface

The following introductory account of the history of the Mac Egan bardic family of brehons is an attempt to provide a cohesive framework for their study as an example of a particularly Irish phenomenon. Since a very good compilation of reference material has been already published ("History of Clan Egan" by Joseph J. Egan & Mary J. Egan, Ann Arbor University, Michigan, 1979), I felt that I should try and supplement that work. This is not intended to be an exhaustive treatment. There are many areas of the history of the Mac Egan family which still require research.

The book consists basically of all the known references to the Mac Egan family in the ancient annals of Ireland, supplemented by information from other ancient documents and quotations from relevant publications relating to their history up to about the year 1700. Where relevant, these have been given in translation from the original Irish or Latin. The spellings in extracts from ancient authors have been modernised and the quotations otherwise updated by silently substituting modern terminology where necessary, but every effort has been made to preserve the sense of the original. In order to make these passages easier to identify, they have been printed in a different type. By reading these quotations we can actually hear the words of their authors who, though long dead, are speaking directly to us of their own experiences at a time when the bardic and brehon families were still in existence.

In any work of this nature, the author is invariably indebted to many different people whose interests have been somewhat similar to his own. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Dr. Michael J. S. Egan, who has been most helpful. I am also indebted to the late Herr Claus von Egan Krieger, who shared the results of his detailed researches, and whose encouraging support will be sorely missed. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to the librarians and staffs of the following institutions.

The libraries of University College Dublin, Trinity College Dublin, the Royal Irish Academy, the National Library of Ireland, the Genealogical Office, the Public Record Office.

Any shortcomings and errors I freely admit to be my own, and only hope that there are not so many of them as to spoil the reader's enjoyment.

Conor Mac Hale, Bealtaine 1990.

Introduction

Irish history is a fascinating field of study - not least because of its rich variety and the huge amount of material awaiting investigation and interpretation. There are many ways of approaching the topic, such as national history or local history, but probably one of the most absorbing hobbies to pursue is the study of family history.

It has been said that a person's own surname is the key to a doorway on the past. This is because one of the most interesting ways of gaining some insight into history is to follow the pathway of your own name through the maze of documents still preserved in various sources. When consulting one of these written documents you need to remember it should be interpreted in terms of who wrote it, as well as when and why it was written. Much of the work of modern scholars is taken up with the problem of historical interpretation. Another point is that you should not forget the limitations of some of these sources of information. For example, from reading the old Irish annals you might think that life was one long series of wars, battles, and murders - until you realise that they really consist of records of the most notable events of their times. What kind of picture do you think your descendants might get of life today if you were to compile a scrapbook containing nothing but newspaper headlines, and leave it to them? It is important to remember that history only rarely records the doings of everyday life and ordinary people.

If you were not aware of it already, it should become clear from this book that the Mac Egan family were no ordinary people. This account of the family is intended as a tribute to their role as bardic scholars and brehons. It could indeed be said that the Mac Egans have been one of the most important families in Irish history. If they had not existed, we should have lost forever a precious part of our Gaelic heritage.

What we know today of Irish history and former social conditions owes an inestimable debt to the scribes and scholars of such families and their schools. They were the mainstay of Irish culture for 500 years, and in order to understand the parts of it which we have inherited from them, we need to know more about them. A more general account of the bardic families is in preparation. This present work is being published in order

to underline the importance of this aspect of the Mac Egan family history. The name Mac Egan is used throughout in place of the original Mac Aodhagáin, of which there are many different variations recorded.

Ireland has been described as having once been the "Island of Saints and Scholars", and most people accept that this refers to a far-off Golden Age in the 7th and 8th centuries. However, neither sanctity nor scholarship are the prerogative of any one age and our possession of a vast amount of historical and other information is due to the labours of successive generations of Irish scholars down through the centuries. Each generation carried out their work against the background of their own times and the traditions handed down to them. Irish is the oldest living literary language in Europe, and it was the vehicle by which many of these traditions were passed from one generation to the next. The Mac Egan family played a significant role in this process until the fabric of the old Irish society began to disintegrate in the 17th century, and modern Ireland was born. They protected their ancient culture and did their utmost to preserve it for us their descendants, and for posterity.

The first chapter in this book is an attempt to describe in outline the development of the phenomenon of bardic families. A more detailed account elsewhere indicates that they were part of a continuous process of development. Another chapter indicates what was the province of families of brehon lawyers such as the Mac Egans. A further chapter indicates the origins of the Mac Egan family in the turbulent 12th century when great social changes were afoot in Ireland.

Another chapter consists of records of the family preserved from the 13th to the 17th century. Some of these make interesting reading while others leave us wondering what more we could find out. The Mac Egans of Ormond became particularly important and their fortunes in the 17th century are dealt with in a separate chapter. A general outline of various Mac Egan castles and estates follows in the next chapter. What I have taken the liberty of calling the Mac Egan inheritance is dealt with in yet another chapter.

Finally, there is an account of the Mac Egan genealogy. Like other aspects of this work, it is not exhaustive. In general, I have confined myself to providing information not published elsewhere, or else an alternative interpretation of previously published documents. It is very likely that

much more information will yet come to light from various repositories. Hopefully we may see before long an improved edition of one or other of the works on this family's history. Having tried to provide a history of the family from the 12th to the 17th century, I now leave it to my readers to research their own roots back from the present. I hope you may enjoy the experience as much as I have.

Na Bardscoileanna

It was an important concept of the ancient Celts and of the Irish that a man's name or honour was of great significance and that, whatever happened, his name should be remembered after his death. This idea was the mainstay of thousands of poets and scholars whose main source of income for many hundreds of years was closely bound up with the composition and compilation of what can only be described as propaganda. It is because of this that we know so much of Irish history. No Irish ruling family of any importance could afford to be without the services of these scholars for very long. Combined with the social pressure to pass on privilege and property rights in their services from father to son in scholarly families, this led to the development of hereditary or bardic scholar families. They have come to be termed bardic because it was from them that those poets who were called bards were produced.

Modern research indicates that these bardic scholars inherited at least part of the function and role formerly the province of the pagan druids in the 5th century. The religious aspect of the druidical function was taken over by the christian clergy as the conversion of the people of Ireland progressed during the 5th and 6th centuries. However, traces of the former pagan religion lingered on as superstitions and customs surrounding several rituals. Other more secular functions were passed on to the poets, physicians, historians and lawyers. However, some traces of their pagan religious origins still clung to several aspects of their role and in this respect they can be regarded as the descendants of the druids.

The secular schools run by many of the bardic families exhibited features of both monastic scribal traditions (such as annals), and the oral traditions of the poets. More and more of these bardic schools appeared from the 12th century on and they became the hereditary possessions of certain families to be maintained by them for centuries, with the support of wealthy and powerful patrons. They were the Irish equivalent of the continental universities, with the essential differences that their language was Irish and not Latin, and they were secular institutions. In fact, a 17th century poem refers to the bardic schools as a university of art (i.e. the art of poetry).

Their independent character notwithstanding, the bardic schools did develop into a remarkably uniform educational system without ever possessing any formal centralized administration. They provided a pool of talent consisting of educated scribes and bards and became one of the mainstays of Irish society. Gaelic-speaking Scotland was also embraced in this system and use was made of a standard formal language to unite Scots and Irish in one cultural area. This language is now called Classical Irish, and it was so successfully handled by the scribes and scholars that it is difficult to detect any great difference between a poem composed in the 12th or 13th century and a similar formal poem of the 17th century. This classical period in Irish literature lasted for half a millenium from about 1150 to about 1650. The schools run by the bardic families were what formed and maintained it. These families were a particular feature of Irish social history during that period. Although some of them became significant landowners in their own right, most of them depended almost exclusively on the support of their patrons for their scholarly activities.

The bardic families provided their patrons with advisors, ambassadors, clerks, lawyers and counsellors and no ruling family could afford to be without the support and service of at least one bardic family for very long. The greatest achievement within the system was to become an ollamh or professor. This involved a long basic course of study after which, provided he belonged to one of the bardic families and had sufficient talent and influence, the candidate could be appointed to the position by a patron.

Not all scholars were so fortunate. The relationship between ollamh and patron was frequently very close, the ollamh often functioning as a sort of prime minister with a rank in society equivalent to a bishop. As well as acting as advisor to his patron, he also had the right to preside as an oide (teacher) over a school. He was also often the ceann fine or head of his family. His druidical origin is evident from the important role that an hereditary ollamh played at the inauguration of his royal patron. From the recorded descriptions of such ceremonies it is clear that the ollamh functioned as a sort of priest ministering by conferring kingship at the "marriage" of the king with the sovereignty of his lands and people. Although these scholars often acted as propagandists for their patrons, of even more fundamental importance was the fact that they recorded for posterity the deeds and relationships of the patrons' families. This fact

was widely recognised by both patrons and scholars and contributed in no small way to the powerful influence of the bardic families in Irish society at large.

The annals record a continuous process of evolution and development among the bardic families. They first appear in succession to the poets, taking on some of the educational functions of the monastic schools. This process came about as a result of the widespread religious reform of the monasteries in the 12th century. This century was a time of particularly dramatic social change in Irish history. Political events were only one facet and in Ireland today we can trace at least two social structures directly back to the developments that occurred then. One of these is the organisation of the church into dioceses and parishes. The other is the use of surnames. Irish surnames can generally be traced back as far as the 10th century, although some of their genealogical descents can go much further back in history. In general, a surname beginning with O' is older than one beginning with Mac. Very often an O' surname dates to the 10th century, and a Mac surname to the 12th century.

The complete list of surnames of bardic families can be roughly classified on the basis of the subject-areas most commonly associated with each of them. Thus there were approximately 40% poets, 30% doctors, 20% historians, 8% lawyers and 2% musicians. The main areas of study in their schools were Filiocht (poetry), Seanchas (history), Feineacheas (law), and Leigheas (medicine). Ceol (music) was practised as a speciality by only a few families. Bardic families tended to specialize in one area although several of the wealthier families and some individuals became expert in more. As well as being known for their expertise in areas such as law and history the family of Mac Aodhagáin or Mac Egan were noted for their musical skills. Some of them also established a reputation for their poetical skill. By the end of the 17th century the Mac Egans had come to be associated with the following counties: Carlow, Clare, Cork, Donegal, Dublin, Galway, Kerry, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Mayo, Offaly, Roscommon, Sligo, Tipperary and Westmeath.

It was during that century also that many of the diverse spellings of the name came into being, as hard-pressed clerks grappled with the difficulties of writing down unfamiliar Irish words and surnames in Latin and English forms. There are no fewer than forty different variants of the Irish surname O'Dubhda or O'Dowd for this very reason, and it is certain

that there must be many more of the name Mac Aodhagáin. Examples are Mac Egan, Egan, Keegan, Mac Yaghan, Mac Kegan, Mac Rogan, Mac Kiggon, Mac Keggan, Mac Eggane, Mac Kiggen, Mac Keagan, Mac Kiggin, Gegan, Mac Egan, Eagan, Macyghan, Egane, Macegayn, Mac Egane, Kegane, Eagon, Keigan, Mac Caegan, etc. The spelling Mac Egan has been used throughout this book as the equivalent of the original Irish name Mac Aodhagáin.

Na Breithiúin

A clear distinction is made in the annals between the two institutions of law current in Medieval Gaelic Ireland, the Canon Law of the church and the civil law known as the Brehon Law. Teachers of Canon Law were nearly always closely associated with a church or monastic foundation, and were known under the title master. Some of them were graduates of English or continental universities.

Practitioners of civil law were known as Brehons, which derived from the Irish word breitheamh for a judge. These men could become ollamhs or professors in their own right. It is an interesting fact that very few of the bardic families specialised in the practise of Brehon Law. Another fact is that these particular families mostly seem to appear in the annals after the year 1200. It was about this time that the Galls or strangers, as the Irish termed them, had taken over much of the lands and property rights of former ruling families following the Anglo-Norman invasion. It is possible that the brehon lawyers helped in the interaction between the Galls as landowners and the former rulers and tenants in particular areas. They also appear not to have come into real prominence as lawyers until after the political revival of the Gaelic rulers in the early 14th century. After the Anglo-Norman invasion had been accommodated and the Galls or strangers had carved out a niche for themselves in Irish society, there was a significant restructuring of relationships. There were changes in landownership in particular.

When former ruling families re-established their control of areas taken over by the Galls, the former tenants did not always receive the recognition they might have expected. For example, when the O'Dubhda rulers regained control of their kingdom of Tireragh from the Bermingham family in what is now County Sligo, former tenants were not automatically re-instated. In one instance, a branch of the O'Dubhda family claimed and took possession of an estate at Scurmora and Bartra near Enniscrone by reason of their intermarriage with the former tenants, the O'Flynn family. An agreement was apparently arrived at between the different branches of the O'Dubhda and this was recorded at a later date in the famous manuscript The Great Book of Lecan. The agreement appears

to date from the middle of the 14th century.

It was about this time that a branch of the Mac Egan family settled under the O'Dubhda patronage to dispense justice. O'Dubhda was a supporter of O'Connor Don of Roscommon, and it is no surprise to find that he turned to the family of O'Connor's brehons when he had need of legal advice. The lords and chieftains had to repay debts and establish a firm political base, and this led to a carve up of land along new lines. In order to try and prevent civil war (not always successfully!), the situation was regulated and controlled in as orderly a fashion as possible under Brehon Law. There must have been a great many disputes but a consensus seems to have been largely achieved through recourse to the judgement of brehon lawyers. This appears to have led to a flowering of bardic families specialising in this kind of work after the Bruce campaigns of 1315.

In a passage contained in his work, The Great Book of Genealogies (1650), Duald Mac Firbis mentions that:

"The brehons of Ireland used to preserve history likewise, because he who is not an historian is not a brehon, and he who is not a brehon (qualified) in the 'Bretha Nemed' is not an historian - that is the last book of the work of the historians and also of the brehons".

In his work on the authors of Ireland (1657) he states that:

"All true knowledge is seanchas (history) because it is in history that the true knowledge of the land and of all the wisdom that is known to the people of the great wide world lies, although it may be difficult for us to find any with whom its knowledge may be in perfection. The best men of these (bardic) families were called ollamhs because they were learned in history, and because their duty was investigation into the history of Ireland, in particular the knowledge and laws of the country, from time to time. Although they did not, for some time, follow the acquirement of all of the laws of the Gael because, in recent times, particular families applied themselves to the (different) branches of Irish learning".

These passages seem to indicate that the brehon lawyers were a more recent development than the historians among bardic families. It is a view that appears to be borne out by the other evidence currently

available. Of course, that does not mean that there were no brehons at all in Ireland previous to this. There are in fact references to brehons in the annals in the 11th century and in even older sources before the development of the phenomenon of bardic families. What was a more recent appearance were the bardic families of brehon lawyers.

From the surviving Mac Egan manuscripts we can draw up a list of bardic families who sent their sons to the Mac Egan schools for education, or who were otherwise associated with them. These include Mac Firbis, O'Mulconry, O'Davoren, MacGowan, O'Clery, O'Meara, O'Doran, O'Cuindlis, O'Donnellan, O'Duigenan, etc. Most of these families were chiefly concerned with either history or law and this association of historians and lawyers thus lends support for the statements quoted above from Duald Mac Firbis.

However, there is at least one example of a member of an historian bardic family functioning as a judge or lawyer. In a manuscript now preserved in Stockholm, a judgement of two brehons concerning a dispute over a cow is recorded from the year 1587. This document illustrates the concept of a brehon acting as an arbitrator rather than as a judge together with a law enforcement agency. One of the two men was the famous Cairbre Mac Egan of Redwood Castle in Ormond, but the other name given is that of Eolus O'Mulconry, a member of the well known family of historians. This is a clear example of an historian acting as a judge or brehon lawyer. An earlier member of the O'Mulconry family died while a student at the famous Mac Egan school in Ormond in the year 1432.

Because their ancient Irish culture was so secure in their own times, none of the bardic scholars felt obliged to set down an account of his own profession. They all took their continued existence for granted. Thus we have to rely on various scattered references for our own knowledge of the phenomenon. Particularly useful are the 16th and 17th century accounts of English government officials and scholars. These are nearly always either hostile or patronising in tone. However, if we remember that they were describing a society and culture with which they were unfamiliar and often in conflict, there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the facts which they describe. It is frequently their interpretation of these facts that we might feel inclined to take issue with today. Some of the following quotations have been published more than once before, but that in no way detracts from their relevance here.

A complaint registered in 1537 from the city of Waterford, mentions that the brehon law was in widespread use among the gentry of Co. Kilkenny and that Lady Katherine Butler had a judge (brehon), Seán Mag Fhlannchaidh (i.e. Clancy),

"who took for the use of his judgement one sixteenth of every mark (awarded) from plaintiff and defendant".

The reason for such complaints was the fundamental clash between two judicial systems, the Common Law of the English Government, and the traditional Law of the Brehons.

Where one mark was worth thirteen shillings and fourpence (i.e. two-thirds of one pound), one sixteenth (6.25%) came to the sum of tenpence, or 4p in today's currency (of course this figure has not been adjusted for four centuries of inflation!!!). An old brehon manuscript written by Flann Mac Egan at the end of the sixteenth century also gives details of the remuneration of the brehon lawyers:

"This is the amount of debts and brehon's fees which David paid on behalf of himself and his children to plead concerning their debts and impositions (and) to plead concerning the duties of the children of Mac-in-Iarla (i.e. Burke descendants of the Earl of Clanricarde) of the other part; namely he paid eight pence and a mark to Redmond óg Mac Egan for brehon's fee, and and a groat (four pence) and a mark to Flann Mac Egan. and ten ounces for brehon's fees to Flann and Tadhg, the brehon's fees for discharging everybody's liability; and it is sixteen groats that David gave for wine for the brehons, together with food, so that is four groats and three marks. It is Flann Mac Egan wrote this and he is witness that the debts were paid, and it was in the presence of Finen Mac-in-Fhile that I wrote it.

A further amount, namely thirteen groats, were given by him for the Earl's Kernety (i.e. Ceithearn Tí or household tax for soldiers) on account of the pledge of the son of Redmond, given him in pledge for the pledge of Redmond son of David, who was bound by pledge to the son of Redmond, in order to discharge the liability of everybody, David consenting; and four groats for notarial charges to William Mac Egan at first, and four groats afterwards."

This document clearly comes from the Mac Egan brehons of Duniry, as it concerns transactions involving the relations of the Earl of Clanricarde. It is in fact an audited account of the various fees paid, and is remarkable for the picture it presents of Irish society at a time when contemporary accounts of English and government officials would have us believe that it was a barbaric society.

Thomas Smyth (1561) gives the following description of:

"The Brehon, which in English is called the judge; and before they will give judgement, they will have pawns (pledges) of both the parties, which is called in Irish ulieg' (i.e. uilig/uile = all), and then they will give judgement according to their own discretions. These men are neutral, and the Irishmen will not prey on them. They have great plenty of cattle, and they harbour many vagabonds and idle persons; and if there be any rebel that moves any rebellion against the Prince, of these people they are chiefly maintained; and if the English army fortune to travel in that part where they be, they will flee to the mountains and woods, because they would not succour them with victuals and other necessities and further they will take upon them to judge matters, and redress courses, as well of inheritance as of other matters, although they are ignorant; the which is a great hindrance to the Queen's Majesty's Laws, and hurtful to the whole English Pale."

In this extract we can see the brehon taking the very sensible precaution of obtaining pledges from the litigants prior to giving a judgement. The fact that the combatant Irish armies avoided attacking the brehons reflected their power, influence, and the respect in which they were held. The reference to vagabonds and idle persons probably means the one particular aspect of bardic families in general which attracted the wrath of the English and Dublin government officials. This was their provision of an efficient intelligence and messenger service. It is very likely that it was this one aspect of the bardic families which drew them the unwelcome attention of official notice and enmity. It is very understandable in a war situation. One can hardly blame the brehon families for avoiding having to support the English army on campaign. The reference to their judging matters of inheritance is interesting as it was in this area in particular that the main conflict arose between the brehon law and the common law of England, which the government was trying to

impose on the whole of Ireland.

The following description of a bardic school and the brehon lawyers was published in English by Edmund Campion in 1571.

"Without either precepts or observation of congruity they speak Latin like a vulgar language, learned in their common schools of Medicine and Law, whereat they begin children, and hold on 16 or 20 years, conning by rote the Aphorisms of Hippocrates and the Civil Institutes, and a few other parings of those two faculties. I have seen them where they kept school, ten in some one chamber, grovelling upon couches of straw, their books at their noses, themselves lying flat prostrate, and so to chant out their lessons by piecemeal, being the most part lusty fellows of 25 years and upwards.

Other lawyers they have, liable to certain families, which after the custom of the country determine and judge causes. These consider of wrongs offered and received among their neighbours. Be it murder or felony or trespass, all is redeemed by fines, except the grudged parties seek revenge. And the time they have to spare from spoiling and preying, they lightly bestow in parling about such matters. The Brehon (so they call this kind of lawyer) sits him down on a bank or bench, the lords and gentlemen at variance round about him, and then they proceed".

The first paragraph refers to the technique of learning, which, in an age when books were prohibitively expensive, sensibly concentrated on learning material by heart. The practise was very widespread all over Europe. Although the tone of the piece is rather patronising, the fact that the students referred to could converse in Latin is significant. In fact their education reached a standard acceptable to the continental universities. In referring to the schools of law, the author probably means the canon law of the (Catholic) church, but there is no reason to suppose that the methods of the brehon law schools were any different, although they would not have studied Latin.

The mention of fines in the second paragraph can be confirmed from sources in Irish, where there is evidence of a sophisticated judicial system for dealing with all types of offences by imposing fines.

In common with other ceremonial occasions such as a feast or oireachtas

(meeting), or a royal inauguration, court procedures were conducted out of doors in the open air. This allowed a maximum number of witnesses to be present at the proceedings and in this respect it is interesting to note the existence of a field called Gort na Pléadala (The Field of Pleading). This is about four miles from Redwood Castle in Tipperary, which was once the chief residence of the Ormond branch of the Mac Egans. It is quite likely to have been used as the site of a court of brehon law.

According to a deposition of Grace O'Malley (Granuaile), at the court of Queen Elizabeth I in England in the summer of 1593:

"Among the Irish the widow of a chieftain never got any thirds. His rent was uncertain, for the most part extorted. A woman is only entitled to her first dowry, for which her husband has to give security for restitution. Chieftains usually die in debt, and husbands now and then divorce their wives on pre-contracts, or even put their wives away without any lawful proceeding, and bring in others."

This quotation gives some idea of the use of the brehon law and of the differences between it and the common law, where a widow was entitled to a third of her husband's estate. These differences, as well as the brehon lawyers themselves, are described in the following extract from a description in "The Chronicle of Ireland 1584-1608", written by Sir James Perrott about 1619. This was written as an historical description and needs no explanation as it stands on its own merits. Although antagonistic in tone, it adds a little more to our knowledge of the brehon law and the Irish lawyers like the Mac Egan family, and it also draws our attention to the remarkable fact that it was then easier to obtain a divorce in Ireland than it was in England!

"For the laws and judges they had, I mean the purely Irish laws, they were as different in the several provinces and parts of the kingdom as the places and persons were divided in countries and conditions. For each lord made several orders which once continuing and confirmed by custom were held for laws, as was most agreeable to the wills of the chieftains and their governors. So were their judges called brehons; as simple in judgement as they were subject to those persons who had power over them; being men for the most part illiterate and not furnished with any knowledge but what concerned the customs of the country, and constitutions of their chieftains

It suffices that for execution of justice the Irish had no set or settled form of judicature, neither were those they accounted for their judges learned in civil, canon, or municipal laws of that kingdom. But every lord of a seignory had one commonly called a brehon, supplying the place of a judge, yet skilled in nothing but in the customs of that part of the country wherein he lived, which were usually as different one from the other as could be devised, and those either made or interpreted according to the wills and the pleasures of the chief lords, who did ordain those orders as they authorised such as adjudged them.

The brehons were men nearly unlearned and barbarous uncivil. They kept commonly their consistories and kinds of courts on the tops of hills, where they called such as had any controversies to be determined before them. They dealt as well in divorce of man and wife as in other matters purely laical, but of late times, since the Roman conventicles had greater force than in former times they had, the clergymen took that matter more in hand, yet so as these supposed ecclesiastical judges allow divorce upon small and unwarrantable causes, as for carnal copulation and knowledge of one another before marriage, which they do not make known till they grow weary of one another: for being godparents or baptising one another's children. Many of these allowed exceptions more than allowable lay hidden, and as not at the first known, so easy to be made known and quarrelled as they grew unkind. So were their brehons ready to dissolve marriage."

The reference to godparents indicates a long-standing tradition in Ireland whereby it was considered unlucky for a man and a woman to become godparents to the same child if they intended to marry each other within the year. We can understand that now as this constituted grounds for divorce under the brehon laws!

The clash between brehon law and English common law could have had only one outcome. The activity of government officials and lawyers led to the judges' decision of 1606 regarding the Irish custom of gavelkind - an Irish form of tenure by which land descended from the father to all sons in equal proportions and not by primogeniture. The practice of tanistry was to be condemned by a later decision of 1608. Tanistry was the procedure by which the successor to a chieftain was chosen by election from among the most eligible of his relatives. The following extract

provides a useful synopsis of some of the most important legal aspects of the brehon laws.

"FIRSTLY, it should be known that the lands possessed by the Irish in this realm were divided into several territories or countries, and the inhabitants of each Irish county were divided into several septs or lineageS.

SECONDLY, in each Irish territory there was a seignor or chief, and a tanaiste who was (elected as) his heir apparent. And in each Irish sept or lineage there was also a chief termed the ceann fine or head of his name.

THIRDLY, all possessions in these Irish territories (before the common law of England was established through all the realm as it now is) went always either by tanistry or gavelkind. Each seignory or chieftainship and the share of land which accompanied it, went undivided to the tanaiste, who always succeeded to his office by election or main force, never by descent. But all the inferior tenancies were divisible between the males in gavelkind. Again the estate which the seignor had in the chieftainship, or which the inferior tenants held in gavelkind, was not an estate of inheritance, but a temporary or transitory possession. For the nearest heir to the chief did not inherit, but the eldest and most worthy of the sept (as was the case with tanistry) was often removed and expelled by another who was more active or strong than he; and the lands held in gavelkind were not divided between the nearest heirs male of him who died possessed of them, but between all the males of his sept, in this manner. The ceann fine or chief of the sept (who was commonly the oldest of the sept) made the partitions at his discretion. This ceann fine after the death of the holder of a competent portion of land assembled all the sept, and having put their possessions in a hotch-potch, made a new partition of all. In that partition he did not assign to the sons of the deceased the portions which their father held, but he allotted to each of the sept according to his age the better or the poorer share. These portions or shares so allotted were possessed and enjoyed accordingly, until a new partition was made, which at the discretion or will of the ceann fine might be done at the death of each inferior tenant. So on account of these frequent partitions, removals and transfers of the tenants from one portion to another, all possessions were uncertain, and the uncertainty of possession was the true cause why no civil habitations were erected and no enclosures or improvements made on the land in Irish

counties where this custom of gavelkind was used....

By this Irish custom of gavelkind bastards had shares along with the legitimate, women were utterly excluded from dower, daughters could not inherit if their fathers died without male issue....

For these reasons and since all the said Irish counties and their inhabitants were to be governed by the rules of English common law, it was resolved and declared by all the judges, that the said Irish custom of gavelkind was void in law, not only because it was inconvenient and unreasonable, but because it was a purely personal custom and could not alter the descent of inheritance.

So it was adjudged that the lands in the Irish counties were to descend according to the course of common law, and that women would be endowed, and daughters would inherit, notwithstanding Irish usage or custom.

And where the wives of Irish seignors or chieftains claimed to have sole property in a certain share of goods during coverture with power of disposing of such goods without the assent of their husbands, it was resolved and declared by all the judges, that the ownership of such goods was adjudged to be in the husband and never in the wife, as is the common law in such case.

These resolutions of the justices by a special order of the lord deputy, were registered among the the acts of the council but this provision was added to them, that if one of the Irish possessed and enjoyed a portion of land by this custom of Irish gavelkind, before the beginning of the reign of our sovereign lord the king who now is (i.e. James I, who became king in 1603), he would not be disturbed in his possession but might continue established in it. But that after the beginning of his majesty's reign all such lands shall be adjudged to descend to the heirs by common law, and shall be possessed and enjoyed accordingly."

Decisions such as this implemented the English common law throughout the kingdom of Ireland, which is the basis for our modern judicature, and led directly to the decay of the brehon law. This in turn removed the basis for the existence of the brehon lawyers so that they quickly disappeared as a class in society, except for a very few families such as the Mac

Egans who maintained the antiquarian study of their ancient texts and manuscripts. However, that there was still some uncertainty in the minds of the government officials is clear from the terms of a land grant made in county Laois in 1619. In this it is specifically stated as a condition of the grant that:

"The grantee is not to use the brehon law. His sons and servants chosen to defend said lands to use the English language, dress and customs, as far as is reasonable."

The surviving works of the brehon lawyers contain texts dating back to the 6th century, and probably earlier. They are widely recognised as being an extremely important source of information on ancient Irish social history, but modern scholars have scarcely yet begun to extract their wealth of information. In the early 17th century, the ancient manuscripts of the brehons attracted the attention of the English lawyers - as we can see from the following quotations.

In 1600, the Chief Justice, Sir Nicholas Walsh, wrote to Sir Robert Cecil saying that the English were worried about the old Irish manuscripts. Some of the English born in Ireland had told of *"traitors at Garbhcoil"* near Leighlin who still possessed their Irish books in which were accounts of the lands held by the original inhabitants before they were displaced. They threatened that they would put the English settlers off the lands they had obtained if the Irish won the war then being fought.

In 1606, during an enquiry in Fermanagh, the jury decided, in order to determine with certainty the profits made by Maguire from his household lands, that they would consult

"an old parchment roll, which they called an indenture, remaining in the hands of one O'Breslin, a chronicler (historian) and principal brehon of that country; whereupon O'Breslin was sent for, who lived not far from the camp, but was so aged and decrepit as he was scarce able to repair unto us. When he was come we demanded of him the sight of that ancient roll, wherein, as we were informed, not only the certainty of Maguire's household dues did appear, but also the particular rents and other services which were answered to Maguire out of every part of the country. The old man, seeming to be much troubled with this demand, made answer that he had such a roll in his keeping before the war, but

that in the late rebellion it was burned among other of his papers and books by certain English soldiers. We were told by some that were present that this was not true; for they affirmed that they had seen the roll in his hands since the war. Thereupon the Lord Chancellor, being then present with us, did then minister an oath unto him, and gave him a very serious charge to inform us truly what was become of the roll. The poor old man, fetching a deep sigh, confessed that he knew where the roll was, but that it was dearer to him than his life, and therefore he would never deliver it out of his hands unless the Lord Chancellor would take the like oath that the roll should be restored unto him again.

The Lord Chancellor, smiling, gave him his word and his hand that he should have the roll redelivered unto him if he would suffer us to take a view and a copy thereof. And thereupon the old brehon drew the roll out of his bosom, where he did continually bear it about him. It was not very large, but it was written on both sides in a fair Irish character; howbeit, some part of the writing was worn and defaced with time and ill-keeping. We caused it forthwith to be translated into English, and then we perceived how many vessels of butter and how many measures of meal and how many porks and other such gross duties did arise unto Maguire out of his mensal lands."

That account was written in 1607 by Sir John Davies, the Attorney General, who was present at the incident he describes. It is a particularly valuable historical document in its own right. The Lord Chancellor was Thomas Jones, who was Lord Chancellor of Ireland and Archbishop of Dublin.

In 1612, the Great Book of Lecan - an ancient manuscript of the Mac Fírbis family of County Sligo - became the property of Henry Perse on the 5th of October. He was Constable of Dublin Castle and Secretary to the Lord Deputy, and had been involved in an enquiry into the fishery on the river Moy. Government officials such as Perse knew that these manuscripts often contained details of land boundaries and he doubtless believed it could be of use in applying English laws to Ireland.

The one major recent contribution has been the publication of a comprehensive modern edition of the early texts and commentaries. In the preservation of some of these the Mac Egans and other scholars have placed us forever in their debt. The editor of this modern edition of

brehon laws has deduced that the brehons maintained a body of ancient texts which grew more and more isolated from current practices. They copied the original texts from manuscript to manuscript down through the centuries, and composed commentaries on them which were intended to explain the original laws. However, they became caught up in a situation where it was believed that these semi-sacred texts contained a body of changeless laws which were observed all over the country. In fact this was not true at all, as can be appreciated from some of the English quotations given above.

The practical application of the brehon laws became separated from the transmission of these texts which were revered as the source of their validity. Very often, the brehons were unable to understand the texts completely because they were so ancient. Where they could understand the texts, they frequently tried to reconcile the written ideal - long out of date and fallen into disuse - with current practices which were very different. This led them into some complicated acrobatic maneuvers in their commentaries. These were efforts by which they endeavoured to show that laws which were clearly stated to be generally applicable were really only referring to particularly complicated specific instances. These instances, described in exhaustive detail, could hardly ever have arisen in real life.

Chapter 3

The 12th Century

An 12ú Aois

There were great changes in Irish life during the 12th century. Among them a reform movement in the Church led to a reorganization on a diocesan rather than monastic system. One of the effects of this change was that the ancient monasteries ceased to function as centres of secular learning, although some of them clung to the old traditions for a long time. An indirect effect was the growth of the bardic schools. While the great church conventions and synods were taking place it is thought that the poets and secular scholars held their own meetings. Their aim was to deal with matters of education. Church learning was being particularly fostered in the monasteries and it appears that those involved in traditional secular learning decided to set up their own independent schools.

The monasteries had provided a store of ancient learning until about the early 12th century. With the reform of the church great changes came about and Armagh even developed into a university co-temporaneous with similar institutions in Paris, Bologna and Oxford. The Irish church was brought into line with European developments with Dioceses and Parishes being set up in place of the old Irish monastic system. The monasteries themselves were reformed and reorganised along the lines of their European counterparts. By the middle of the century few of them were still entirely traditional - the majority were in the process of conforming to Benedictine, Augustinian and Cistercian rules. These new-style monasteries broke away from the old tradition, some of them were not teaching monasteries at all and others embraced the new continental scholasticism. The old Gaelic learning and the scribal tradition began to be transferred to the bardic families which had started to appear. These had already imbibed the oral traditions of the poets and now set up their own bardic schools under the patronage of local lords and kings.

It was a time of social change and great political uncertainty and upheaval. Various social forces, whatever their origin and mechanism, were at work to ensure that professions tended to run in families. Apart from intermarriage, the practice of fostering allowed for their spread from one family to another.

However, the final impetus for the emergence of the bardic families was the great period of change in the monasteries and the new political situation in the first half of the 12th century. The old monastic system changed utterly with the introduction of a new emphasis on religious reform. The function of monasteries as centres of trade and secular learning was replaced by a concentration on religion and canon law. Where once the abbot's rule was paramount the bishop became head of a diocesan organisation. At first, those who disliked the new situation had the option of transferring to more traditional monasteries. However, by the middle of the century most monasteries were of the new persuasion. Some of the secular adherents of the former system took over the administration and tenancy of monastic lands. It is thought that some of these at least looked to the education of poets and secular scholars for their livelihood. In this scenario the development of something similar to the bardic families was inevitable. The study of seanchas or history was particularly associated with the old monasteries and it is remarkable that a higher proportion of bardic families specialising in this field had some connection with the church in their early days.

As more monasteries were removed from the sphere of secular education other tenants apparently took up the provision of schools and also developed into bardic families. Still other bardic schools developed from the families of poets patronised by powerful and wealthy rulers. Although we have no direct evidence for such a scenario, there seems to have been a consensus and an organised approach to the problem of providing secular education. It did not happen overnight, but in a period when there were great church synods bent on reform of the religious and monastic system, it stands to reason that secular scholars got together and produced a planned approach to the management of what was to be their livelihood.

Probably the greatest bardic family of brehon lawyers were the Clann Aodhagáin or the Mac Egan family, who were certainly held in great esteem and respect by the other bardic families. An account published from the Great Book of Lecan and the Book of Uí Maine describes the Mac Egans as one of the nobility (Flaith) of Uí Maine or Hy Many in what is now County Galway. According to these and other old manuscripts, the Uí Maine were a people descended from Oriel in Ulster. They had conquered a large territory in Galway and Roscommon as far back as the 4th or 5th century. The O'Kellys were kings of Uí Maine, and one of them, Tadhg

O'Kelly, had been a commander under Brian Boru at the battle of Clontarf, where he was killed in 1014.

The Mac Egan surname dates from the 12th century. They were the chiefs of the Clann Diarmada and acted as marshals of the forces. They seem to have been great warriors and were tributaries of the O'Kellys until they became ollamhs and brehons to the High King. They are described as having been among the leaders who revenged the insults of Hy Many and it was their privilege to array the battalions and go in the place of the High King in the conflict. The inauguration and dethroning of the High King at the instance of Hy Many belonged to the Clann Diarmada of whom Mac Egan was chief. This account appears to refer to a state of affairs prior to and shortly after the Anglo-Norman invasion in the 12th century.

Annála Clainne Aodhagáin

Nothing further is recorded of the Mac Egans for nearly a century until references to them begin to appear in the annals. The following extracts are based mainly on these sources, with supplementary material from various documents which have been preserved.

- 1225** The Annals of Connacht state that Tadhg O'Fianachta, doorkeeper of Aed O'Conchobhair, was killed by the Mac Egans on a plundering raid. This puts them firmly within the ambit of O'Connor politics in Connacht. It is stated elsewhere that the Mac Egans held 24 quarters of land or townlands for their services from Cathal Crobderg O'Connor, King of Connacht, who had died the previous year.
- 1235** With the death of An Giolla Suasánach, or The Mop-Haired Lad, in this year, the annals at last record a member of the family who appears in the genealogy. His real name was Flann Mac Egan and his nickname obviously refers to his hairstyle. This may have some significance in our present context because it is known that some of the bards at least did wear a particular hairstyle.
- 1249** On the 8th of September, Baethgalach Mac Egan was killed at Athenry when he was helping the O'Connors to attack Jordan d'Exeter, the sheriff of Connacht, and the Galls. He too is probably to be identified with one of the earlier members of the family genealogy.
- 1273** Aireachtach Mac Egan was killed in Corann in County Sligo when he was with the O'Connors who tried to prevent d'Exeter raiding the area. There are many references in different sources to the Mac Egans from the 14th century on, and they are clearly identified as being ollamhs in Brehon Law to various patrons. With the help of the annals and other sources the spread of the family to various parts of the country can be traced. From their homeland in Ui Maine, where they served the O'Kellys and the O'Connors of Galway and Roscommon, their influence and spread during and after the first half of the 14th century can be described as nothing short of phenomenal. In this respect they emulated the success of the great O'Daly family of bardic poets. These also spread out over much

of the country from their 12th century home in Westmeath.

To the Northwest the Mac Egans became ollamhs to the Barrets of Mayo and the O'Dowdas of Sligo. To the South they worked for the Burkes of Clanrickard in Galway and the Mac Carthys of Desmond in Cork.

In the Southeast they acted for the O'Connors of Offaly. To the East they served the O'Kennedys of Ormond in Tipperary and the Mageoghans of Westmeath. In the Northeast they represented the O'Farrells of Longford and the O'Rourkes of Breffni in Leitrim. They obviously satisfied a widespread demand for expertise. However, they were not the only brehons and other families practised the art in different parts of the country.

- 1309** Giolla na Naomh Mac Egan, chief ollamh of law in Connacht and the most illustrious of the brehons of his time was slain in a battle at Killycloghan in Leitrim, where he was a member of the party of Aedh Breifneach O'Connor that clashed with another faction of the O'Connors. He is said to have been a universal master equally skilled in all arts.
- 1316** Eoin Mac Egan, brehon to Felim O'Connor, King of Connacht, was slain with his 23-year-old patron at the battle of Athenry on 10th August.
- 1317** Mael Isa Rua Mac Egan died, he was the most learned man in Ireland in law and judicature.
- 1320** Mael Isa Donn Mac Egan and his son were taken prisoner by Cathal O'Connor, when he attacked the MacDermotts of Roscommon.
- 1327** Sadhbh, the daughter of Mac Egan, died.
- 1330** Mael Isa Donn Mac Egan died. He was the chief ollamh of Connacht.
- 1354** Saerbhreathach mac Mael Isa Donn Mac Egan died on Loch Ree. He was the ollamh of Conmaicne in Longford.
- 1355** Tadhg Mac Egan died. He was a learned man in the law.
- 1359** Aedh mac Conchobhair Mac Egan died. He was the best of the

brehons of Ireland. In 1350, he wrote a note in a well known manuscript copy of the ancient Senchus Mar. This text was compiled from older material and written down originally about the year 700.

The manuscript itself dates to the early 14th century and is now contained in manuscript 1316 in the Library of T.C.D. It is the oldest surviving brehon manuscript. The notes written by Aedh read:

" It is one thousand three hundred and fifty years tonight since Jesus Christ was born, and in the second year after the coming of the plague to Ireland was this written and I myself am full twenty one years old i.e. Aedh, the son of Conor Mac Egan, and let every reader in pity recite a 'pater' for my soul ."

" It is Christmas Eve tonight, and under the protection of the King of Heaven and earth I am on this Eve tonight. May the end of my life be holy and may this great plague pass by me and my friends, and restore us once more to joy and gladness. Amen. Pater Noster ."

" Aedh mac Conchobhair mac Giolla na Naomh mac Duinnsléibhe Mac Aodhagáin wrote this on his father's book, the year of the great plague ."

He wrote again in the following year on the same page:

"It is just a year tonight since I wrote the lines on the margin below; and, if it be God's will, may I reach the anniversary of this night many times. Amen. Pater Noster."

This gives some idea of the kind of notes which scribes sometimes wrote in their manuscripts, and the historical interest which they have for us now. Let us hope that Aedh obtained his wishes although he himself was only thirty years old when he died.

The Ormond Deeds, which record some 14th century treaties between the O'Kennedys and the Earls of Ormond, contain a reference to a Simon Mac Egan at an assizes held before Peter Butler, Seneschal of Tipperary, at Clonmel in January of this year. He was admitted to mercy for non-attendance when summoned to appear at an inquisition. This may possibly be the Simon son of Donnchadh Claen who appears on the genealogy as progenitor of the branch of the family serving as brehons to Clanrickard.

1362 Fergal mac Tadhg Mac Egan died. He was a learned brehon.

1369 Eoin Mac Egan died. He was an accomplished young harper of Conmaicne in Longford.

1378 Tadhg Mac Egan, ollamh brehon of North Connacht, died. He was a sage without contention or reproach, who kept a house of general hospitality for all comers. Many of the bardic families maintained such a house or hostel and in fact it may have been both a remnant of the practices of the ancient monasteries and a condition of tenancy. Tadhg Mac Egan's father, Baothgalach Conallach, was fostered or educated in Donegal.

The Ormond Deeds have a record under this year of a Thomas Mac Egan, who was the reeve or magistrate of the town of Ross, and acted as a witness to a legal document containing a transfer of lands. The word sheriff is derived from the office of shire reeve.

1390 Brian Mac Egan, ollamh of Breifne in judicature, died. His wife survived him by 47 years, becoming a nun and dying in a monastery. Seán Mac Egan, 'The Official', succeeded Brian, and was himself slain four nights before Christmas Day. According to the annalists *"it is not known who killed him ."* He may have been previously a church official specialising in canon law.

1393 Donal mac Saerbhreach mac Mael Isa Donn Mac Egan died of the epidemic after a victory of generosity and penance. He was buried on Inis Clothrann in Loch Ree County Roscommon. He was a well-informed, very learned ollamh of brehon law to the O'Farrells of County Longford, to O'Connor Roe and the people of County Roscommon, and to a great number of Irishmen as well. He was a defender of the Church, and a preserver of the rights of every family. It is also recorded that a Donnchadh Mac Egan was Archdeacon of Killaloe about this time.

1399 Baethgalach Mac Egan died. He was a man extensively skilled in the brehon law, and in music, and had kept a celebrated house of hospitality. He was the ollamh brehon of Tireragh in County Sligo and of Tirawley in County Mayo.

Giolla na Naomh mac Conchobhair Mac Egan died. He was the chief ollamh of brehon law in Ormond in County Tipperary. It was he who apparently owned an ancient manuscript book of annals which was copied at Ballymacegan nearly two hundred and fifty years after his death.

It has been identified as being the Book of Clonenagh in Laois, an ancient monastery mentioned in the annals between the 7th and 11th centuries. This book was used as a source by Keating in writing his famous historical work "Foras Feasa". Giolla na Naomh was also the teacher of Maghnus O'Duibhgeannain, one of the scribes of the Book of Ballymote.

1401 Giolla na Naomh Mac Egan died. He was ollamh brehon of O'Conchobhair of Offaly and of MagEochagain of Westmeath.

1404 Tadhg mac Baethgalach Mac Egan died. He was the intended ollamh of North Connacht in brehon law.

1408 A manuscript containing the text known as The Book of Ollamhs was written in this year at the Mac Egan bardic school in Park, County Galway. The Scribe was Aedh O'Dubhdabhoireann. His work is now part of the Yellow Book of Lecan in Dublin. There are a few scribal notes in this manuscript which may be of interest:

"I think, o school, that it is well that I have got the candle from you by scheming"

Apparently the scribe was working by candlelight when he should have waited for daylight.

Another note along similar lines reads:

"This is a page I wrote on St. Nicholas night, and all the school idle except myself, and may God forgive this to me and to the woman who gave me light i.e. Sheila."

Finally,

"This is a bad page, the worst of all, and bad luck to the woman who is in fault and who set my mind from one land to another."

1409 Muirheartach Mac Egan died. He was the ollamh brehon of Teffia in Westmeath. He was a learned and profound adept at his own profession.

1411 Mághnus mac Baethgalach Mac Egan, the prior of Sligo, died. His death is noted in the famous Leabhar Breac, originally known as the Great Book of Duniry. This manuscript was written between 1408 and 1411, by a scribe named Murchadh O'Cuindlis, probably under commission from a Mac Egan patron. The book was owned by the Mac Egans of Duniry for hundreds of years, and came to be so closely identified with them that it was believed to have been written by one of them until a modern scholar discovered the identity of the true scribe in 1973. O'Cuindlis had previously been a student of the Mac Firis bardic family in Tireragh, Co. Sligo. His work appears in two of their great manuscripts, The Yellow Book of Lecan and The Great Book of Lecan.

1413 Mac Egan of Ormond died i.e. Dónal mac Conchobhair mac Giolla na Naomh, a man learned in the brehon law. Part of the famous Book of Ballymote was written in his house some twenty years earlier.

1422 Cosnamhach óg Mac Egan was accidentally killed by the O'Melaghlins of Meath. He was in the castle at Horseleap in County Westmeath with MagEochagain and a few of his men, when they were attacked. He was there in his capacity as ollamh to MagEochagain and O'Conchobhair of Offaly, to act as intermediary for MagEochagain with some of his own followers who were in rebellion against him. Thinking that the attackers were the MagEochagain rebels, he mounted his horse and rode after them when they withdrew. He followed them westwards as far as Tobar Brighde (St. Brigid's Well). The O'Melaghlins were lying in ambush there and fired the arrows that they had ready in their bows when they heard the rider approaching. Mac Egan was killed instantly by one of the arrow-shots.

1430 Fergal mac Baethgalach mac Tadhg Mac Egan died. He was ollamh of North Connacht in law, universally learned in every art, and kept a house of hospitality for all who came to visit him.

1432 Grigoir mac Sean O'Maolchonaire, a student of history, died in the house of Mac Egan of Ormond where he was being taught.

1433 Calbhach O'Connor of Offaly, and his wife Margaret O'Carroll,

issued two invitations to feasts to the bardic scholars of their time. The first feast was held on March 26th at Killeigh in Offaly. There was an attendance of 2,700 and the head of each bardic family, with their attendants and kinsmen, had their names written in a roll by Giolla na Naomh Mac Egan, ollamh brehon to O'Connor, for fear of mistake.

The first on the list was Maoilin O'Maolchonaire. Then they were fed with meats and given money outside the church. Margaret presided in state, surrounded by her friends, clergy and brehons, after she had left two gold chalices on the altar in the church; and Calbhach, on horseback at the side of the church, saw that all was in order and that everyone received his share in turn. The second feast was held on August 15th, at Rathangan, for those not present at the first one. The number mentioned gives some idea of how many bardic scholars there were in the country at the time. Feasts such as these reflected the appreciation and respect of their patrons for the bardic families. Such generous feasts were also held by other patrons such as William O'Kelly and his son Maelseachlainn in Uí Maine in 1351, Ruairi MacDermott and his wife Sadhbh de Búrca at Loch Cé in 1540, and Traolach Luineach O'Neill in Ulster in 1577. Each of these feasts was held at Christmas time.

Both the O'Kelly and O'Neill feasts were immortalised in bardic poetry by two famous poets, Gofraidh Fionn O'Daly and Tadhg Dall O'hUiginn. The two poems have survived and have since been published. They were entitled "Filí Eirinn go haointeach" (i.e. The poets of Ireland went to the same house) and "Nollaig do chuamar chun Chraoibh" (i.e. At Christmas we went to the Creeve - near Coleraine in Co. Derry). There is also a record of yet another such feast being held by O'Rourke.

1436 Giolla losa Mac Egan died. He was ollamh to Mac Wattin Barrett of Tirawley in County Mayo, a pious, charitable and humane man, and the superintendent of schools of jurisprudence and poetry. Giolla losa was an unusual name in the Mac Egan family, but it was frequently used by the Mac Firbis historians. One wonders whether this man had been named from the Giolla losa Mac Firbis who died in 1361, after teaching for 60 years in his family's bardic school. Possibly his father, Tadhg Mac Egan, had come to the school and married the daughter of Mac Firbis. Giolla losa's nephew, Diarmaid Mac Egan, was a canon of Killala in this year.

1437 Gormlraith, the daughter of David O'Duigenan died in the

monastery of the Holy Trinity on Loch Key. She was the wife of Brian Mac Egan, who had died in 1390, and she eventually became an anchorite in this monastery.

1438 Conor Mac Egan died. He was the ollamh of Mac William Burke of Clanrickard in County Galway.

1443 Giolla na Naomh mac Giolla na Naomh mac Aedh Mac Egan of Ormond died. He was ollamh of Munster in law (inaugurated in 1413), the teacher of Ireland, and a man generally skilled in each art, who kept a house of public hospitality for all.

Aedh mac Fergal mac Baethgalach Mac Egan died in the Springtime of his prosperity. He was ollamh of North Connacht in law, the chief judge of Tíreragh in County Sligo, and the most fluent and eloquent of the Irish of his time. The branch of the Mac Egans he represented appear to have died out or moved away from north Connacht after his death. It is likely that their function as brehons was taken over by the Mac Firbis bardic family. However, there are records of Mac Egans in the baronies of Tirawley and Tíreragh in counties Mayo and Sligo during the 17th century.

1447 Giolla na Naomh mac Aireachtach mac Solamh Mac Egan, the most learned brehon and ollamh of law in Ireland, died.

1473 Brian mac Robert Mac Egan, ollamh in law to O'Connor Don and to O'Hanley of County Roscommon, died.

Mac Egan of Ormond i.e. Giolla na Naomh, died.

1474 Giolla Finn Mac Egan, ollamh to O'Conchobhair of Offaly, died.

1486 Tadhg Mac Egan, ollamh to the O'Farrells of Annaly in County Longford, was slain in an abominable manner by the faction of Irial O'Farrell.

1487 Seán mac Conchobhair Mac Egan, ollamh to Mac William Burke of Clanrickard in County Galway, died.

1526 In a treaty drawn up between the Mageoghan and Fox families, the brehon Muircheartach Mac Egan is referred to as one of the judges

charged with overseeing its terms.

1528 Mághnus mac Domhnaill Mac Egan died.

1529 Cosnamhach mac Fergal mac Donnchadh Dubh Mac Egan, the most distinguished adept in Ireland in brehon law and in poetry, died and was buried in Elphin in County Roscommon.

Mac Egan of Ormond died i.e. Donal mac Aedh mac Donal, the chief of the learned men of the south of Ireland in law and in poetry.

In this year also, the State Papers record that a court in Galway accepted and recognised the judgement of a Mac Egan brehon in a dispute over land.

1548 On the 2nd of May Patrick Mac Egan, brehon, of Ballindurry Co. Kildare, was granted English liberty (i.e. full rights under the common law) for himself and his issue. He lived in the territory of the Bermingham family in north west Kildare.

1569 In this year the Manuscript known as O'Davoren's Glossary was written by a group of students at the Mac Egan Law school at Park in Co. Galway for Donal O'Dubhdabhoireann of Clare. One of the students was Dubhaltach Mor Mac Firbis.

1583 According to the Ormond Deeds, Cairbre Mac Egan of Redwood was a juror at an inquisition held in Clonmel on September the 20th.

1584 Tadhg Mac Egan, ollamh in law to the faction of Richard óg Burke, died.

On the 8th of October in this year Cairbre Mac Egan of Redwood castle acted as brehon in a dispute between two branches of the O'Kennedys of Ormond. His written judgement has survived. It has been published in the original Irish, with an English translation, in the Appendix to the 29th Report of The Deputy Keeper of the Public Records in Ireland. In this document he makes the comment that his judgement is being set down in writing because

"gur fearr litir ná cuimhne mar adeir memoria vadid, litera custodid"

i.e. writing is better than memory as it is said memory departs, writing lives.

1585 In this and in the following year, various members of the Mac Egans of Pallis near Killarney were granted pardons in the fiants of Elizabeth. They included Baothgalach Dubh Mac Egan, who was known as a poet - although his family provided brehons to the Mac Carthys.

1587 Donal mac Baethgalach Mac Egan died.

The following document is preserved in a manuscript in Stockholm and contains one of the rare brehon law judgements. It is also of particular significance for the fact that one of the judges was a member of the O'Maolchonaire bardic family of historians:

"This is the judgement given between Owen mac Cairbre mac Cuconnacht and Brian O'Brien concerning the cow between them in that Brian sold the cow (i.e. to Owen). According to the custom of the country they came before a jury and the judgement was that Brian was free of responsibility for the cow given by Eolus O'Maolchonaire and Cairbre Mac Egan the 6th day of June in the year of our Lord 1587. I am Eolus. I am Cairbre."

There must have been something wrong with the cow, which Owen only discovered after buying it!

1590 According to the Ormond Deeds Thomas Butler, Earl of Ormond, made a grant to Dermot O'Kennedy of various castles and lands including Uskean, Kilnalagh, Dromod and Redwood. Among the witnesses listed on the 12th of September were John Mac Egan and Dermot Mac Egan.

1591 In a fiant dated the 12th of February Patrick Mac Egan, gentleman, of Carrickbeg near Ballymahon in Co. Longford was appointed

"seneschal of Carrickbeg alias Ballymacegan, in the County Longford, with license to prosecute and punish by all means malefactors, rebels, vagabonds, rhymers, Irish harpers, idle men and women, and other unprofitable members."

He was probably brehon to O'Farrell Buidhe of Pallis near Ballymahon, and is mentioned as being a brehon in another document dated the 12th of

June 1602. It is possible that he was a descendant of the Patrick Mac Egan mentioned above under the year 1548.

1601 Cairbre óg mac Cairbre Mac Egan, ensign to the son of the Earl of Ormond, was slain at Kinsale on the 24th December.

1602 Donnchadh mac Cairbre Mac Egan was slain at Portland in Lower Ormond when the armed forces of Cairbre, who was the Sheriff of Tipperary, attacked O'Sullivan Beare's party as they were crossing the Shannon.

This is in fact the last reference to the Mac Egans in the annals and we are obliged to turn to other sources for further information from this point on. The annals themselves ceased to be kept up to date at about this point in time as the bardic families started to turn away from their scholarly pursuits when the patronage of the Irish aristocracy was diminished and removed. It is said that the last bardic schools finally disappeared about 1640.

We can see from these quotations from the annals that the nature of these records needs to be kept in mind at all times. Most people are basically law abiding, and there is no reason to assume that this was not true of the bulk of the population right back through the ages. The traditions of Irish law as recorded by the Mac Egan brehons go far back into the mists of unrecorded time. It is worth remembering that the main reason the records in the annals give the impression of almost constant warfare and mayhem is that they are simply the equivalent of today's newspaper headlines and obituaries. It is generally the unusual happenings and wrongdoings of individuals that are listed, simply because they were unusual.

From the various extracts quoted above we can see that the Mac Egans' interests were not confined to the brehon law. There are some references to their skills at music and poetry as well. In the various manuscripts associated with them we can see how their interests also extended to the study of genealogy, annals, religious tales and history.

Chapter 5 The Mac Egans of Ormond in the 17th Century

Mac Aodhagáin Urmhumhain san 17ú Aois

Like the 12th century, the 17th century in Ireland was a time of great social change. This was the time when the land of Ireland changed hands. From being 90% Catholic at the beginning land ownership became 90% Protestant by the end of the century. This process was already happening in the courts by the 1630s as a result of sales, mortgages and other legal procedures. It was accelerated by the confiscations which followed the two great wars of the century.

During the peace which began in 1603 many men were made redundant who had known nothing for years except the craft of soldiering and warfare. According to a Government report in 1609 there were

"2000 idle men in Connacht who have neither house, lands trade nor other means but live idly and feed upon the gentlemen of the country".

Although some ex-soldiers often possessed estates of land they were not farmers. The government realised the danger of having so many redundant soldiers about and they came up with the plan of allowing them to enlist in the army and take ship for service abroad. This certainly disposed of part of the problem but not without its own dangers as we can see from the courtmartial of a Colonel O'Dowda in 1629. He had planned to sack the city of Derry with his regiment before sailing for Spain.

After the Flight of the Earls in 1607 another plan was the Plantation of Ulster which appeared to be so successful that a similar scheme was proposed for Ormond and another for Connacht by Sir Charles Coote in 1631. The landowners who opposed it managed to hold off this threat with great difficulty but many of them had to mortgage their lands in an attempt to survive. Speculators like merchants from Galway such as the Lynchs, Kirwans and Darcys were able to obtain possession of land in Connacht and elsewhere by purchase and by giving mortgages at interest rates of 10%. Shakespeare wrote a satirical elegy on an English speculator named John Combe which refers to this:-

"Ten in the hundred lies here engraved,

*'Tis a hundred to ten his soul is not saved;
If any man ask, who lies in this tomb?
Oh! Oh! quoth the devil, 'tis my John-a-Combe".*

Many old landowning families mortgaged about a third of their lands but those most severely affected had sold or mortgaged nearly 80% of their lands by 1640.

Some of the Protestant clergy also began speculating in land and it is very likely that this was resented by local people. They would have assumed that their tithe money was being used for land speculation. But what probably caused most resentment was the introduction of Scottish and English tenants by the new landowners. The original Irish tenants were frequently unable to pay high rents so that the landlords were tempted to look farther afield for those better able to pay and more willing to introduce new farming methods to increase productivity. The Protestant clergy naturally gave preference to tenants of their own religion and this introduced an even more insidious element into what was becoming a dangerous situation.

When rebellion broke out in Ulster the men of Connacht were not long in following suit. There were several isolated incidents and atrocities but these were remarkably few, given the later Cromwellian propaganda. The rebellion quickly spread across the whole country which became embroiled in a long and complicated series of wars which lasted for more than a decade. This was followed by what has become known as the Cromwellian Plantation and confiscation of land. Another shorter war at the end of the century, known as the War of the Two Kings - when Jacobite and Williamite supporters fought on behalf of their respective sovereigns, was also followed by a wave of land confiscations which finally altered the whole structure of Irish society.

Cairbre Mac Egan was the head of the Ormond branch of the family. Although he was acting as a brehon in the late 16th century, he could surely see clearly that the future of his family depended on his being able to adapt to the new conditions under English Law. He was very influential and, as we shall see, had a family of at least seven sons and one daughter. He became Sheriff of Tipperary and left his property to his eldest surviving son and heir at his death in 1602. This man's name was Baothgalach and he ran another famous bardic school, together with his

brother Flann, at Ballymacegan. One of their students was Micheal O'Clery, the chief of the Four Masters.

Probably one of the most important documents surviving from the early 17th century concerning the Mac Egans has been wrongly described in previous publications. It is in fact a Chancery inquisition post mortem. It was held following the death of Sir John Davies, who had died in England on the 8th of December 1626. The main purpose of the document was to establish the legal right of Constance Mac Egan to his ancestral lands. The following is a free translation of the most relevant extracts taken from the Latin original, now held in the Public Record Office in Dublin.

This document is a copy of an inquisition held before John Southwell at Clonmel on the 19th of March 1629. Southwell was feodary of the Court of Wards for Munster. The document recites that Cairbre Mac Egan was seized of the lands of Ballymacegan, Dromod, Carroweinty (i.e. Carrowenmota) and Kilnalaghagh at the time of his death about 27 years previously. Baothgalach Mac Egan was his son and heir, of full age and married.

After the death of his father, Baothgalach took possession of the estate. Next, he transferred it all by deed to John mac Tanock Bourke and his heirs for the use of William Mac Egan, Flann Mac Egan and Cornelius Mac Egan, his own brothers, their heirs and assignees. By following this procedure he avoided paying various taxes such as livery and feudal incidents.

John Bourke, together with William, Flann and Cornelius, transferred all of the lands by deed bearing date the 26th day of January 1611 to Constance Mac Egan, his heirs and assignees. It is at least possible that this transfer was occasioned by Constance coming of age (i.e. his 21st birthday).

On the 26th of April 1611, Constance surrendered all of his lands to the king, James the First, his heirs and successors. This was probably done under the terms of a process known as Surrender and Regrant.

By royal patent given at Dublin, and dated the 23rd of May in the ninth year of his reign (i.e. 1611), the king granted the lands to Sir John Davies, his heirs and assignees. Davies was the Attorney General and escheator

dealing with wardships. The lands in the grant were to be held of the castle of Dublin in free and common soccage. This meant that the lands were to be held free of nearly all taxes such as wardship, marriage, primer seisin, relief and licence to alienate.

By deed bearing date the 7th day of June 1611, Sir John Davies granted the lands to Constance Mac Egan, his heirs and assignees. This grant of lands was to be held in the manner and form of the concessions given to Sir John Davies and all of the property had been held at the time of his death by Cairbre Mac Egan.

This remarkable document provides us with a glimpse of the legal system at work in Ireland in the early 17th century, in the period of transfer from the brehon laws to English law. It also gives us some information on the Mac Egan family of Ormond, and provides the starting point for further investigation. At the very least it provides circumstantial evidence that Constance Mac Egan was a minor and a ward in the early 17th century. First however, at least two of the transactions listed can be confirmed from an independent source. In the Calendar of the Irish Patent Rolls of James I we find the following:

"Surrender, by Constantine otherwise Cosnamhach Mac Egan - Tipperary County. In Lower Ormond barony; Ballymacegan, Dromod, Kearhowenmota, and Kilnalagh, containing one and one half couple of land, country measure - 20th April 1611."

"Grant from the King to Sir John Davies, knight, Attorney General - Tipperary County. The towns or parcels of Ballymacegan, Carrownevota, Dromod, and Kilnalagh, containing one and one half caple of land; rent sixteen shillings to hold for ever, as of the castle of Dublin, in common soccage, by fealty - 23rd May 1611."

The next point we have to deal with is - who was Cosnamhach or Constance Mac Egan? It is clear that he was not a son of Cairbre, who died about 1602. However, according to a pedigree registered in the genealogical office in 1715, he was the "son of Daniel Egan of Ballymacegan, son of Carbry Mac Egan of the same, Esq.". This indicates that he was a grandson of Cairbre.

If we look at the Chancery inquisition again it becomes clear that the

early transfers of the lands mentioned in it appear to have been efforts to hold them in trust for Constance until he came of age to inherit in 1611. This means that he was born in or before 1590. Thus it is at least possible that Donal, his father, was the eldest son of Cairbre and that he died sometime between 1590 and 1602.

His grandfather, Cairbre, could have left a will assigning the property to Constance. Or he could have left a will assigning it to his sons in trust for his grandson, who must have been a minor. There was undoubtedly some transfer of the property needed in order to protect it in the interests of the family. This was because of the existence of the Court of Wards. This institution dealt with the situation when a landowner died leaving an underage heir. The heir normally became a ward, and the lands were vested in the crown. When Cairbre died his sons may have pre-empted this procedure and acted as trustees for Constance until he reached his majority. This would explain the first two transfers but not the part of John Bourke in them, unless there was a mortgage involved, or that he was actually the guardian of Constance. Another factor was probably the transfer to the Common Law from Brehon Law. Without further evidence it is impossible to go much further than this at present.

The transactions involving Constance himself surrendering the lands to the king and obtaining them again from Sir John Davies is an example of a variant on the process of Surrender and Regrant which was in widespread operation in Ireland at the time. The object was to register the claim of the king to full title of all land and to grant a patent to landowners subject to rent. The intervention of Davies meant that Constance obtained a better title to the lands, and probably more favourable conditions of tenure than otherwise. When Davies died, the Chancery inquisition registered this title of Constance in a formal manner. The Mac Egans of Ormond seem to have had influence and coped very well with the transition from brehon law to English.

If we now turn to what might at first seem to be an unrelated reference in the Funeral Entries of the British Museum, a further clue emerges. This is contained in the funeral entry registered in 1640 for Tadhg Mac Egan of Lisleigh, who had died at Bristol on the 29th of August 1638. According to this reference Tadhg was the second son of Dermot Mac Egan of Lisleigh, who was himself the 3rd son of Cosnamhach Mac Egan of Ballymacegan. This means that Cairbre Mac Egan of Redwood had two brothers, and one

of them was this Dermot or Diarmaid.

Another funeral entry records that Margaret, a daughter of Cairbre Mac Egan of Redwood, had been married to Donal O'Hogan at some time prior to 1615 or so. However, she died without issue and he married a second time, having four children before his death in 1632. His youngest daughter was named Margaret. The annals also record the fact that at least two sons of Cairbre predeceased their father.

Thus Cairbre Mac Egan had the following family: Domhnall or Donal, also known as Daniel, who may have been the eldest son and who probably died before his father sometime between 1590 and 1602, next Cairbre óg (+1601) who was killed at the Battle of Kinsale, Donnchadh (+1602) who was killed by the O'Sullivan Beare party, Baothgalach (living in 1629), William - who was living in 1629 (and died before 1640), Flann who probably died at the end of 1643, Conla who was living in 1640, and Margaret (who died before 1615). There may well have been others, but no record of them has so far come to light.

According to a letter of 1630 written by Phillip Percival to Sir William Parsons, who was Master of the Court of Wards:

"Rory O'Kennedy gave in a list of his lands (and) the jury found that he was seized in fee of various lands mortgaged to Constance Mac Egan for #300. ... Upon occasion of conversation with Mr Daniel O'Brien of Annagh in Ormond, I find he is most willing and desirous of a plantation (which is much voiced this long time) and if he could be assured that any reasonable respect would be had of him, he would submit to it under his hand, and so would twenty more, as he told me. This gentleman ... has a pretty estate in Dowharrow, from his father, Sir Teal Garrath, and by his being sheriff and otherwise has acquired a better in Ormond, and there matched his children, and carried a great stroke there, securing various of the Kennedys, his followers. He is foreman of our jury. Constance Mac Egan, the chief of his sept (i.e. ceann fine), told me of himself in private conversation that he would not be the last, but if any man would submit to a plantation, he would. ... The country, you know is a sweet country, and the people in my poor judgement may never be so easily dealt with as now ... they being poor and weary of their present condition; and to speak truly I find a general will, if the matter be speedily and well handled, all with one consent (at this enquiry) to have his martearle (i.e. a chief rent of the

Earl of Ormond), some openly calling it a black rent."

From this letter we learn that Constance Mac Egan (or Cosnamhach i.e. 'The Defender' in Irish, a particularly apt name for him as it transpires), had become a wealthy landowner and the chief or head of his name. Indeed, it is more than likely that it was he who supported the bardic school run by Baothgalach and Flann Mac Egan at Ballymacegan. It is interesting to note that by astute management he succeeded in achieving what he probably would have considered a successful outcome. It is clear from the later records that his family became what we would now consider landed gentry.

The reference to the plantation is interesting as there were various suggestions for a plantation of Ormond and Connacht. Some landowners stood to gain in various ways from these suggested plantations, but nothing came of them in the end. One of the means by which they stood to gain was by an increase in mortgages. The transfer of lands in Ireland has been oversimplified in the past by assuming that corrupt government officials duped, hoodwinked and stole their way to large estates, or that conquering English soldiers grabbed all from the poor Irish after defeating them in battle. Of course this happened, but the transfer of lands was already in progress between Irish landowners in the legal system long before the rebellion of 1641. In fact many Irish landowners and merchants speculated and made fortunes by giving mortgages on lands at the prevailing rate of 10 percent interest. The activities of Constance Mac Egan are simply an example of this widespread business practice. He is recorded as having given #200 to John Kennedy of Ballingarry for a mortgage on 200 acres of land at Lismallin. The mortgage fell due, was not paid, and he obtained possession of the land with four thatched houses at some time before 1640.

The Mac Egan's descended from Constance even obtained a coat of arms reflecting their origins as warriors and marshals but, interestingly enough, containing no reference to their function as brehons. Complementing this fact is the following verse of a poem written by a bardic scholar, Seán Mór O'Dubhagáin, who was ollamh in history to William O'Kelly and who died as a monk in 1372. His poem states:

*"Precedence for his valor and fame
Be given to Mac Egan the noble.*

*Record him for the activity of his warriors,
Of his prosperity and great renown."*

It is remarkable that there is no reference in this poem to the undoubted importance of the Mac Egans as ollamhs and brehons even in the poet's own day.

According to the Ormond Deeds, on the 20th July 1632,

"Walter Earl of Ormond etc. have demised unto Constance Mac Egan of Kilmalahagh in the County of Tipperary Gentleman the town and hamlet of Uskian in the barony of Lower Ormond containing one ploughland with all the houses, etc. thereto belonging to have and to hold for the term of 21 years for £10 sterling yearly from the Feast of All Saints."

Uskean is now known as Uskane near Borrisokane. The 21-year lease must have been extended subsequently or purchased outright, as the family lived there towards the end of the century.

Constance appears to have survived the wars of the mid 17th century, although probably not completely unscathed.

On 30th June 1653, another letter from the Egmont manuscripts, written by John Percival to a Mr. Stapleton reads as follows:

"I cannot wonder enough at your tenants' boldness, first to trespass on my lands of Spittle, to abuse and beat my tenants and most injuriously to make a riotous rescue. I fear your not having those lands from me is in great measure the cause of it, but do you think there is no law in Ireland or no power which will not suffer rebels thus to insult over Englishmen? My estate has been too long at the devotion of bloodthirsty men, but God in his due time will cause them to make restitution, and neither your power nor your malice will prevail. I desire you to make satisfaction for the injuries done by your tenants to Constance Mac Egan, or greater trouble will necessarily happen to you and them."

The Civil Survey of 1654, which lists the landed proprietors of Tipperary prior to the Rebellion, in 1640, gives no less than eleven references to Constance Mac Egan of Kilmalahagh. There is no doubt but that he was a very important landowner in his own right. Tracing the lands associated

with Cairbre Mac Egan of Redwood in this survey we find the following:

Redwood itself, consisting of 310 acres containing *"an old ruined castle the walls only standing and two thatched houses"*, was in the possession of Conla Mac Egan of Redwood. This was probably the Cornelius Mac Egan, son of Cairbre, mentioned in the Chancery inquisition of 1629.

Ballymacegan, consisting of 650 acres, was shared jointly by Flann Mac Egan of Ballymacegan, Constance Mac Egan of Kilmalahagh, and John Mac Egan of Grange.

Dromod, of 278 acres containing one thatched house and a garden plot, was in the possession of Donnchadh Mac Egan of Dromod.

Carrowenmota, of 64 acres with one thatched house, was shared jointly by Flann Mac Egan of Ballymacegan, John Mac Egan of the same - probably the son of Flann's brother William, and by Constance of Kilmalahagh. This John Mac Egan was probably the man for whom Phillip O'Duigenan drew up a family genealogy in the year 1644. Perhaps he may have had some hopes of using it to claim title to some of the Mac Egan lands, if the rebellion then being fought against the English government had succeeded.

Kilmalahagh, consisting of 454 acres containing *"a ruined castle the walls only standing, a garden, four cottages, and a water course mill"*, was in the possession of Constance Mac Egan.

These lands totalled 1,756 acres - but the unit of measure used was the Irish acre, which is equivalent to one and two thirds statute acres. This means that the estate consisted of nearly two thousand five hundred statute acres together with two castles, a mill, four thatched houses, and four cottages. Of course this was only a part of the Mac Egan property. Constance Mac Egan had about 3,600 statute acres, John Mac Egan of Cloghustan had 900 acres, and Cormac Mac Egan of Ballyknave owned another 900. Some idea of the size of the Mac Egan estates in Ormond may be obtained from the fact that one of them, Cairbre Mac Egan of Kilmalahagh, was granted nearly 1,500 acres (i.e. more than 2,000 statute acres) of land in Clare and Galway, when he was transplanted there as a landowner shortly after 1654. He was only one of several grantees. Up to that time the Mac Egans had been one of the most important landowning families in Lower Ormond. With over 11% of the land, they owned more

than the Earl of Ormond himself, and were second only to the O'Kennedy family. Not all the Mac Egans moved from Ormond in the Cromwellian Transplantation. It was still one of the most common surnames in the barony according to the Census taken five years later.

Another branch of the family lived at Lisleigh and owned extensive property. Some details of them are recorded in the Funeral Entries. Their chief representative was Stephen Mac Egan of Lisleigh, who specified in his will of 1667 that John Mac Egan of Uskean (the son of Constance) should oversee its execution after his death, which occurred the following year. This John may just possibly have been a lawyer and he is recorded as having been a plaintiff in Chancery proceedings in 1675. He erected a memorial tablet in the Dominican Priory church at Lorrha. The inscription reads in Latin:

"Pray for the souls of Constantine Egan, gentleman, and his son John, who erected this monument for themselves and their descendants. The 4th day of October A.D. 1689."

This seems to indicate that Constance was still alive at that date, in which case he must have been nearly 100 years of age.

The Hearth Money Rolls for County Tipperary, which record the payment of a tax of two shillings each on fire hearths in 1665 and 1667, contain the following names of Mac Egans:

John of Uskean, Constance and Daniel of Lisduff, Solomon and Cormac of Modrinny, Cosnamhach of Templenny, Morgan of Cashel, Conor of Barnane, Felim, Cairbre, Constance, and Rory of Ballymacegan, and Stephen of Lisleigh as well as Una, Joan and Catherine of Anamaidel.

At the beginning of the 18th century John Mac Egan's son Darby Egan, who was a counsellor or barrister at law, purchased some of the original family property which had been lost in the Cromwellian and Williamite confiscations. On the 28th of July 1715, he obtained a grant of a coat of arms from the genealogical office. In this is given his descent from Donal Mac Egan of Ballymacegan.

He had a son named John, who married Laetitia Barker - a daughter of Sir William Barker of Essex. They had a son named Darby who had his portrait

painted about 1770. It is still in existence. He made his will in 1788 and died sometime before 1801. His widow, Bridget Egan, married a second time and was widowed again.

Their son was named Barnaby, and he entered King's Inns to train as a lawyer in 1801. He and his wife Julia had a son named Darius John, who also entered King's Inns to train as a lawyer in 1834. He practised at Dublin and Roscrea and married a Miss Conmee of Co. Roscommon.

Their son Darius Joseph was born in 1856. He trained as an artist in Dublin and London and worked on the staff of Punch magazine. He made a name for himself as a skilled artist and married a Miss Marie O'Beirne. He revived the title of 'The Mac Egan' about 1907 and died without issue in 1939, the last direct link with the Mac Egans of Redwood and Ballymacegan.

Sealúchas Mhic Aodhagáin

As far as their aristocratic patrons were concerned the bardic families earned their keep by their services. These ensured that the patrons name and honour or fame would never die. A bardic family might become very wealthy indeed. In fact, however, they were always the tenants of their patron unless he chose to remit their rent - which was done on occasion. Very often the bardic family inherited a tenancy of land by right of their provision of these intellectual services. The patron exercised a right to appoint an ollamh who was generally also the head of the bardic family. Where the ollamh was not the head of his family, or ceann fine, he had to be provided for separately. Some patrons chose not to appoint an ollamh on a permanent basis, but distributed largesse and payment for poetry and other works on commission. Like other tenant families, the bardic families might have a tenancy in a castle, or they might build one themselves.

One of the most famous bardic schools of the Mac Eigans, and probably their original home, was at Park castle between Tuam and Gienamaddy in Co. Galway. This was in the region of Uí Maine (Hy Many), or the O'Kelly country. According to their genealogy the Mac Eigans were descendants of the Uí Maine. The O'Kellys were one of the chief supporters of the O'Connor kings of Connacht so it is not surprising to find that the family of the royal brehons remained settled among them near their patrons. The castle is referred to in several legal documents between 1574 and 1618.

It is interesting to contrast the references to the landowners of the Mac Eigans of Park with the Mac Eigans of Ormond. When the Patent Rolls of James I are consulted, it appears that the land tenure at Park was rooted firmly in the brehon laws in 1618. This is illustrated by references to individuals such as Feardorcha Mac Egan of Park, who owned one twelfth of one half quarter of Timard, or Flahell Mac Egan of Park, who owned one eighteenth of the quarter of Trineclanegan (i.e. the third of the clan Egan). Another such reference records that Edmund and Eoghan Mac Egan of Lisnadedg owned one quarter of one half cartron in the quarter of Curragh. Such divisions of land and property are a particular feature of the brehon law custom of gavelkind, by which all of the sons of a landowner, both

legitimate and otherwise, inherited equal portions. The Mac Eigans of Ormond seem to have given up this customary division of property at an earlier date.

To illustrate how some of the surviving scattered references to various individuals may yield up genealogical data on the Mac Eigans, these records can be used to construct a tentative family tree for the Mac Eigans of Park in the early 17th century. In 1574, a government document lists Seán Mac Egan as owner of the castle of Park. Eleven years later, Fearganainm Mac Egan is listed in the Composition of Connacht as an owner of Park. In 1618, Tadhg and Tadhg óg Mac Egan are listed as part owners of Park, together with Cormac and Domhnall Riabhach Mac Egan. Kathleen Mulchrone gives Baothgalach as being Tadhg óg's son, and identifies him with the famous Baothgalach Rua Mac Egan. However, she is almost certainly mistaken in that identification as the dates do not allow for this Baothgalach to have been a teacher of Mícheál O'Clery, the chief of the Four Masters. The most likely candidate is the brother of Flann Mac Egan already mentioned. In any case, she was not able to consult the original manuscript sources for much of her work on the Mac Egan genealogy. She lists at least seven manuscripts that were not available to her at the time. This was because she wrote her article in 1944, when these manuscripts were stored in underground vaults for protection during the war. This shows how much there can still be done in research into this topic. When the Great Book of Genealogies is finally published from the original manuscript of Duaid Mac Firbis, we may confidently expect to restore many missing details in the family tree.

An extension to the castle of Park was built by Cormac Mac Egan in 1627. However, after the wars of the mid 17th century, the main landowners of the family were forced to leave and settle elsewhere in Galway and Clare, although some Mac Eigans remained in the neighbourhood. The Funeral Entries contain a document recorded in 1639 which give a pedigree extending back some 300 years. This concerns the funeral entry of another Baothgalach Mac Egan and indicates that his family had been settled at Lisnekyragh in Co. Galway since at least 1400 A.D. They were probably a branch of the Mac Eigans of Park. Baothgalach himself, who died in 1634, is recorded in the Patent Rolls as having received the following

"Grant from the King to Baothgalach Mac Egan of Creggan in County Galway, gentleman; Lisnegiragh and Moher, two and one quarter cartrons,

one half quarter of Leaderry near Lesdrissaghan, in the half barony of Ballymoe. 28th November 1618."

There are several other records concerning Mac Egan in Creggan as well as at Park. The survival of these and other records, although scattered in several different repositories, offer hope that even more facts may yet come to light concerning the history of the different branches of the family.

The Mac Egan family of Duniry appear to have been given a tenancy in Duniry castle, with other properties such as a mill, by the Burkes of Clanrickard. They were living there in 1574, when it is recorded that "*Cairbre Mac Egan and the judges*" were the proprietors of the castle. There had been Mac Egan ollamhs to Clanrickard as far back as the 1430s but, in common with many other landowners, the family finally lost their lands in the Cromwellian plantation. The Earl of Clanrickard owned land in the Barony of Kilmaine in Co. Mayo, and it is probably through this association that Cosnamhach and Seán Mac Egan owned Castle Martyn in Ballymartin in the year 1574. Eoghan óg Mac Egan and Mourn, his mother, are recorded as landowners in Ballymartin by the Strafford Inquisition in 1635.

There are references in the Strafford Inquisition of Co. Mayo to various Mac Egan in the baronies of Burrishoole, Murrisk and Carra, where there is clear evidence of intermarriage with the Staunton family. The family in Murrisk appear to have been wealthy, because they are recorded as investing in property by giving mortgages, and one of them travelled overseas. The family in Carra must have been there for quite some time, as one of them owned a property called Lismacegan. The Books of Survey and Distribution record a Solomon Mac Egan as owning Killdavioge and Casheldowna in the parish of Kilcummin, in the barony of Tirawley. He is amongst those listed as forfeiting proprietors during the Cromwellian Transplantation. Others listed are Daniel Mac Egan of Ballinderry Co. Kildare, Cosnamhach, Flann, Cairbre and Murtough Mac Egan of Co. Kerry.

Transplanters certificates were issued to the following: Stephen Mac Egan of Lisleigh, John Mac Egan of Uskean, John Mac Egan of Cloghustane, Cairbre Mac Egan of Kinalahagh, and Andrew Mac Egan of Ballyknaven. All of these were in Co. Tipperary. Certificates were also issued to Murtough Mac Egan of Coulebane in Co. Kerry, and to a Brian Mac Egan, for whom no

address is listed. These certificates allowed the landowners to travel with their households to their new estates assigned by the government commissioners in Cos. Galway and Clare.

The Mac Egan of Ormond in Tipperary were proprietors of more than one castle. One was at Kinalahagh and another at Redwood, or Coillte Rua, where the family had a famous bardic school at nearby Ballymacegan. The latter building was originally constructed about 1210 by the Anglo Normans. It was captured by the O'Kennedys in the mid 14th century and enlarged by building upwards. The Mac Egan ollamhs became the tenants and they improved the building at the end of the 16th century. It was ruined and left derelict as a result of the Cromwellian wars but Michael J. Egan, a Mayo lawyer in the family tradition, purchased the building in 1972. He repaired and renovated it and made it into the family home it is today. It is now the centre for the biennial Clan Egan gathering.

There was another Mac Egan castle at Lisleigh, near Borrisokane. Stephen Mac Egan was the proprietor there when he registered the funeral entry of his father, Tadhg, on the 7th of February 1640. Tadhg had been the second son of Diarmaid Mac Egan of Lisleigh. He was in turn the third son of Cosnamhach Mac Egan, gentleman, of Ballymacegan, the father of Cairbre. Cosnamhach was the eldest son and heir of Domhnall, who was in turn the eldest son and heir of Giolla na Naomh Mor Mac Egan, chief of his name in County Tipperary, who had died in 1473.

Tadhg Mac Egan, of Lisleigh, had been married to Eleanor, the daughter of Irial O'Kennedy of Castletown. He died at Bristol on 29th August 1638, and was buried there in the church of St. Stephen two days later. His eldest son and heir was Stephen, who was married to Onora, the daughter of Tadhg O'Carroll of Culeonnane. His other children were Dermot, Peter, William, Donal, Margaret, Katherine, Una, and Mary, - all of them unmarried in 1640. There had also been three sons and a daughter who had died as infants.

Stephen Mac Egan, of Lisleigh, is mentioned seven times as a landowner in the Civil Survey of 1654, which records the landed proprietors in Tipperary prior to the rebellion. In 1664, a release dated the 9th of December of the previous year was registered at the Court of Chancery. This records that Nicholas White esquire of Leixlip, County Kildare, granted to Stephen Mac Egan, gentleman, of Scribboge, County Tipperary, -

Lisleigh, Gortnefalskye, Ard cappagh, Curughcanaanane, Ballyrourkes, Fedanes, Ballykinase, Munagougie, Cooleveghevoi, Cappaghnemucke, Cuilagh, Glahaskine, Kiletomodane, Gerteene, Crannagh, and Monsea, in the barony of Lower Ormond - for a rent of twenty shillings.

It appears that, having lost his possessions in the Cromwellian confiscations, Stephen was once more in a position to buy them back under the Restoration. Three years later, on 9th September, he drew up his will containing the following directions:

"My body to be buried in the parish church of Borris(okane). To my wife Constance Mac Egan an interest in the lands of Crecnia, Gleaheskin, Cuiltegh, Derinbeghalla, and Coappsyhamore during her life. All the rest of interest in lands and lease to my son and heir Thady Mac Egan in the County of Tipperary and Galway and in all other places, he paying her marriage portion for my daughter Onora Egan and all the rest of my children's portions."

He appointed four executors including his son Thady Mac Egan and William Mac Egan of Lisseamin, and directed that John Carroll of Ballintean and John Mac Egan of Uskean should *"take account from them of the execution of the will."* His signature was witnessed by four men. Probate was granted on 6th August 1668.

John Mac Egan of Uskane has already been mentioned. He inherited this property from his father Constance, who obtained it from the Earl of Ormond as recorded in one of the Ormond deeds, dated 1632.

Further information about this property is preserved in a letter written in 1692 by Francis Aungier, Lord Longford, who was a commissioner appointed to manage the Earl of Ormond's estates, to John Ellis the under-secretary of state to King William III. In this he gives the following account, which has recently been published in the journal *Analecta Hibernica*.

"I desire you to acquaint her Grace (the Duchess of Ormond), that one Mr. John Egan in the year 1669 took a lease from the late Duke (James, died 1688), of Uskane and Drumnemehane in the county of Tipperary for 31 years which determines at Easter in the year 1700 at the rent of £16 per annum, and £1 acates. The number of acres are 579 and the rent seems

very disproportionate to them, and ruminating upon the reason why so small a rent was reserved I recollected that I often heard the late Duke mention this Egan with great kindness saying he and his family had been in all times faithful to the house of Ormond and stuck close to them in opposition to those of the Irish who were always contending with them.

And this poor gentleman in the late times gave an example of his integrity for he was the single Irishman who paid his Easter rent 1689, whereas most of the rest paid not their half year's rent 1688. This poor gentleman died in the year 1690 and now his son John Egan, a Protestant lawyer, having taken out letters of administration to his father, though he has 8 years of the former yet unexpired, offers to surrender it and to take a new lease for 31 years or 3 lives paying the 1st year £16, the 2nd £20 and for the remainder £31, with the annual acates. That farm is now so fully waste, there being no tenant upon it nor an house standing, the lands having had the misfortune to be on the frontier and liable to the rapine and destruction of both armies. Now though by our commission we have power to set leases yet without her Grace's consent (who ought rather than we to judge of the merit of this family to the house of Ormond) we do not think fit to conclude in this gentleman unless her Grace approves of it. Therefore I beg of you to represent it to her Grace ..."

Brother Michael O'Clery, chief of the famous Four Masters, was educated at the Mac Egan school in Ormond. When he had completed his work on the annals of Ireland the very next thing he did was to come and visit Flann Mac Egan at Ballymacegan in 1636. He arrived by boat on the Shannon from the Poor Clare convent of Bethlehem near Athlone, where he had written part of a religious text in Irish for the nuns living there. His visit to Ballymacegan was in order to obtain written official approval from one of the foremost bardic scholars of his day, Flann Mac Egan. Students came from all over Ireland to the Mac Egan school in Ormond but Flann Mac Egan was not the head of the family in his day. It may be of interest to quote his words concerning the Annals of the Four Masters, since the issue of this written approval was probably one of his last functions as an ollamh brehon:

"Whereas the poor friar, Michael O'Clery (in obedience to his superior, Father Joseph Everard, Provincial of the Order of St. Francis in Ireland) came to show me this book, - I, Flann, son of Cairbre Mac Egan, of Ballymacegan, in the county of Tipperary, do testify that, - though many

were the books of history of the old books of Ireland which I saw, and though numerous the uncertain number of ancient and modern books which I saw written and being transcribed in the school of Seán, son of Torna O'Maolchonaire (living in 1603), the tutor of the men of Ireland in general in history and chronology, and who had all that were in Ireland learning that science under his tuition, - I have not seen among them all any book of better order, more general, more copious, or more to be approved of, as a book of history and annals, than this book.

I think also that no intelligent person whatever, of the laity or clergy, or of the professions, who shall read it, can find fault with it. In attestation of which thing aforesaid, I here put my hand on this, at the Ballymacegan aforesaid, the 2nd of November 1636. Flann Mac Egan."

There were two manuscript copies of the Annals of the Four Masters made. One was a rough copy, taken from many different manuscript originals, and this was apparently intended for their patron, Fergal O'Gara. Another fine copy was also made and sent to the Franciscan college at Louvain, where it was intended that it should be printed. It was not in fact published for two centuries, but that is another story. It is not known whether Flann Mac Egan actually autographed both copies, or only the O'Gara set. This point could be investigated by comparing the handwriting in the manuscripts now preserved in the Franciscan Library at Killiney in Dublin, and the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin. Flann Mac Egan was apparently old or ill enough to be near death in September 1642, when Rory O'More wrote to Fr. Hugh Burke O.F.M. in Belgium as follows:

"If we may, afore Flann Mac Egan dies, we will see an Irish school opened, and therefore could wish heartily that those learned and religious fathers in Louvain did come over in haste with their monuments and with an Irish and Latin print."

We may wonder whether there might be any traces of his age or state of health in Flann's handwriting in 1636.

The only work of Michael O'Clery which was published in his own lifetime (he died in the winter of 1643) was his "Foclóir nó Sanasan Nua" or dictionary. This was published in Louvain and was dated the 28th of October 1643. Some quotations of extracts from the introduction are important for the information they contain about the Mac Egan scholars he

was associated with:

"A New dictionary in which is explained the meaning of difficult words in Irish, written in alphabetical order, by the poor lay brother of the Order of St. Francis i.e. Michael O'Clery, in the College of the Irish brothers in Louvain, and printed by authority, 1643. Amen.

Dedicated to my honoured Lord, and friend, Baothgalach Mac Egan, Bishop of Elphin.

To the Reader ... Baothgalach Rua Mac Egan, was one of the principal men I followed in explaining the words dealt with in this book.

And though each of these people was an accomplished scholar I followed Baothgalach in particular, because it was from him that I myself learned, and found written with everyone else, the explanations of the words with which I deal; and further because he was a learned sage practised in that craft I know other good scholars in this craft, and further in more recent times, such as Seán O'Maolchonaire, chief tutor of the men I have already mentioned and of the men of Ireland, in history, in his own time, and Flann, son of Cairbre Mac Egan, who is still living...."

Another famous visitor to the Mac Egan school in Ormond was Duaid Mac Firbis, known as the last bardic scholar. He copied a set of annals there in 1643 for the Rev. Dr. John Lynch, a patron who had set up the College of St. Nicholas in Galway. Perhaps this college was founded as a result of the wish referred to by Rory O'More. These annals have since been identified as the annals of the monastery of Clonenagh in Laois. Seán Mac Egan was still living at Ballymacegan in 1644, when his family genealogy was written out there by a scholar named Philip O'Duigenan, but nothing further is known of the bardic school. It is possible that Mac Firbis paid a later visit there and somehow acquired some or all of the library. In any case he obtained possession of several valuable manuscripts which must have originated from this school. It is probably significant that he wrote on one of them that he was its owner in 1666. After his death, his collection was acquired by the Welsh scholar Edward Lloyd and has since found its way to Trinity College Library in Dublin.

On the 5th of May 1643, the earliest date associated with him, a note in one of his manuscripts tells us that Duaid Mac Firbis copied out a short

dictionary at Ballymacegan in Co. Tipperary. We know that Flann Mac Egan was still alive in October of that year because Brother Micheal O'Cleirigh expressly says so in the introduction to his dictionary or 'Sanasan Nua' published in Louvain. We can thus be sure that Duaid Mac Firbis knew Flann Mac Egan personally. John Lynch ran the College of St. Nicholas during the period 1642-1652, where Mac Firbis acted as tutor to the young Roderick O'Flaherty, another famous Irish scholar, who was a relative of Duaid's hereditary lord David O'Dowda. There was yet another school at Quin in Co. Clare, which is said to have had 800 students in 1644.

In May 1657, Mac Firbis wrote an essay on the Authors of Ireland in which he states:

"I am sure that there is not a word of Féineachas (i.e. Brehon Law) in the head of any man in the world but what is possessed by 3 or 4 of the descendants of the ollamhs of Connacht. Woe is me! That Ireland should have such little regard for the preservation of knowledge or nobility."

The annals copied by Mac Firbis for Lynch have since been published and identified by a modern scholar as probably having come from the Book of Clonenagh (an ancient monastery near Portlaoise), which was used as a source for his book 'Foras Feasa' by Geoffrey Keating. This monastery also had associations with Aedh Ua Crimthainn, the scribe of the 12th century Book of Leinster, whose patron was the infamous king of Leinster, Diarmaid Mac Murrough.

In order to have some idea of what life was like in an Irish castle like that at Redwood in the 17th century, we might consider the following quotations. In 1620, an English judge who settled at Limerick, Luke Gernon, provided a description of life in an Irish castle, although he pointedly remarked on the poor furnishings and bad cooking:

"The castles are built very strong with narrow stairs, for security. The hall is the uppermost room, let us go up, you shall not come down again till tomorrow. Take no care of your horses, they shall be cessed among the tenants. The lady of the house meets you with her train. It is counted an indignity not to kiss each of the ladies, even if it were the Lord Deputy himself."

Salutations past, you shall be presented with all the drinks in the house, first the ordinary beer, then whiskey, then sherry, then old ale, the lady tastes it, you must not refuse it. The fire is prepared in the middle of the hall, where you may solace yourself till supper time, you shall not want for sherry and tobacco.

By this time the table is spread and plentifully furnished with a variety of meats, but ill cooked and without sauce. Neither shall there be wanting a pastry or two of red deer (that is more common with us than the fallow).

The dish which I make choice of is the swelled mutton, and it is prepared thus: They take a principal wether, and before they kill him, it is fit that he should be shorn. Being killed, they singe him in his wooly skin like a bacon, and roast him by joints with the skin on, and so serve it to the table. They say that it makes the flesh more firm, and preserves the fat. I make choice of it to avoid uncleanly dressing.

They feast together with great jollity and healths around; towards the middle of the supper, the harper begins to tune and sings Irish rhymes of ancient making. If he be a good rhymmer, he will make one song to the present occasion.

Supper being ended, it is at your liberty to sit up, or to depart to your lodging, you shall have company in both kind. When you are come to your chamber, do not expect canopy and curtains. It is very well if your bed content you, and if the company be great, you may happen to be bodkin in the middle.

In the morning there will be brought to you a cup of whiskey. This whiskey or uisce beatha of Ireland is not such an extraction as is made in England, but far more qualified, and sweetened with licorice. It is made potable, and is of the colour of muscadine. It is a very wholesome drink, and natural to digest the crudities of the Irish feeding. You may drink a naggin without offence, that is, the fourth part of a pint.

Breakfast is but the repetition of supper. When you are disposing of yourself to depart, they call for a 'deoch an doras', that is, to drink at the door, there you are presented again with all the drinks in the house, as at your first entrance. Smack them over, and let us depart".

In 1644, a french traveller named de la Boullaye le Gouz comments that:

"The castles of the nobility consist of four walls extremely high, thatched with straw; but to tell the truth, they are nothing but square towers without windows, or at least having such small apertures as to give no more light than a prison. They have little furniture, and cover their rooms with rushes, of which they make their beds in summer, and of straw in winter. They put rushes a foot deep on their floors and on their windows, and many ornament the ceilings with branches".

However, following the wars of the mid-seventeenth century, most of the former landowners lost their possessions. Some of them were transplanted to Connacht, while others remained near their original homes in reduced circumstances. With the change of government during the Restoration a few of them managed to obtain grants or to buy back some of their former property. At this stage, there were many of them who had expectations of being restored, like the king, to their previous status. Duaid Mac Fírbis mentioned this when he wrote:

"It is no doubt a wordly lesson to consider how the Irish were at one time conquering countries far and near, and that not one in a hundred of the Irish nobility, at this day, possesses as much of his land as he could be buried in, though they expect it in this year, 1664."

Oidhreacht Mhic Aodhagáin

Although they made valiant efforts to do all that was in their power to preserve their property the Mac Egans lost nearly all of their landed possessions in the course of the seventeenth century. Most of them were taken away by the Cromwellian government after the rebellion of 1641, although some Mac Egans were transplanted to new estates in Clare and Galway. The remainder was lost after the War of the Two Kings between the Jacobites and Williamites at the end of the century.

Many members of the Mac Egan family must have felt that they had failed utterly and lost all that was worth having in their lives. However, they did survive and one only has to look at the telephone book today to see just how successfully. What men like Constance and Flann Mac Egan did was not at all in vain. Some might disagree but it is clear that the real inheritance of the Mac Egan brehons was not land at all, and that it still survives today, carefully preserved and protected in various libraries and repositories around Europe. It lies in their manuscripts. Modern scholars are only now beginning to get to grips with what the Mac Egan scribes and scholars spent half a millenium in preserving and passing on for future generations. They have left us a precious link with an historical past that goes back to the sixth century, if not earlier.

There are more than twenty manuscripts associated with the Mac Egans. Many of them were commissioned by Mac Egan scholars, while others were written by Mac Egan scribes themselves. A few of them were once owned by members of the family, or formed part of the library in their schools.

Probably the most significant book of all to be associated with the Mac Egan brehons is the manuscript known as the **Senchus Mór**, i.e. Seanchas Mór (lit. great knowledge) or laws. The word seanchas was in common use in Irish to indicate specialised knowledge in different fields e.g. seanchas coiteann (lit. common knowledge) or genealogy, dinnsheanchas (lit. knowledge of places) or topography, naomhsheanchas or history of the saints, bansheanchas or history of (famous) women. The word seanchas on its own indicated what we now call history and folklore.

The Senchus Már manuscript was written in the first half of the 14th century, probably for the Mac Egan school near Redwood and Ballymacegan in Ormond. There appears to be no reference to Ballymacegan in the 14th and 15th century manuscripts, but there is frequent mention of a place called Cluain Leathan (lit. wide meadow), which have been the original name of the place now called Ballymacegan.

One of the chief scribes of the Senchus Már was Lucas O'Dalláin, who was living in 1346. Other scribes were members of the Mac Egan family, and one of these was Aedh Mac Egan, who wrote a long personal note in the book during the great plague in Ireland in 1350. His own death is recorded in the annals nine years later, when he was only thirty years old.

This manuscript was once in the hands of Duaid Mac Firbis, but is now in the library of Trinity College Dublin. It is the oldest surviving brehon law manuscript, and it contains some of the most ancient written texts of old Irish laws. Some of these even date back as far as the middle of the seventh century A.D.

There are three sections in the manuscript. The first section contains 14 leaves or 28 pages, and is coloured with red, purple and green. It is in this section that Aedh Mac Egan wrote his note in 1350, on what was originally page 36. The second section contains twenty-six leaves. It has no scribal notes to indicate names, but it has been dated to the 14th century. The third section consists of only two leaves written by a scribe named Cairbre. A note written by a scribe named Dáibhi, who may have been an O'Doran, refers to "*great fighting in this present year i.e. 1466*". Another note mentions the deaths of two men, named Cormac and Giolla na Naomh óg, in the same year.

The texts contained in the manuscript have been identified as consisting of four parts of the complete Senchus Már. These laws deal with

1. Validity of contracts, social status, subdivisions of the fine or sept, duties and rights of fiefs and lords,
2. Honour price, the rights of women, bees, mill ponds, pledges, theft,
3. Vassalage and contractual rights and duties of different social orders,

4. The Heptads - material from different areas of law, arranged in groups of seven.

Parts one and two are contained in section one of the manuscript. Part three is in section two, and part four is in section three. Part three is said to have an ecclesiastical tinge to it.

The Senchus Már manuscript has the distinction of being the first to have been photographically reproduced in collotype facsimile using modern techniques. This was done by the Irish Manuscripts Commission in 1931, using apparatus installed at the Ordnance Survey in the Phoenix Park in Dublin. The work was overseen by two famous scholars, Richard I. Best and Rudolf Thurneysen. Work on a similar facsimile of the famous Book of Lecan was suspended in order to facilitate the publication of the Senchus Már.

One of the ancient texts contained in this manuscript has recently been edited and translated by a team of scholars at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. This publication gives some indication of the vast wealth of information stored in this and other similar manuscripts. The text chosen was that of the "Bech Bretha", or Laws of Bees. It was edited by T.M. Charles-Edwards and F. Kelly in 1983. The amount of research and effort that is now being undertaken on such ventures can be gauged from the fact that, apart from these two editors and the printers and publishers, no less than twenty-four people are named as being involved in this particular publication. Only six pages of the manuscript were considered. These have produced a book of 214 pages containing the text, translation, notes and introduction. It deals not just with the laws relating to the keeping of bees in ancient Ireland, but also with history, genealogy, beekeeping techniques and text tradition. A more general "Guide To Early Irish Law" has also been published by F. Kelly (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988).

Another famous manuscript associated with the Mac Egans is the **Book of Ballymote**, part of which was written in the house of Domhnall Mac Egan in Ormond at the end of the 14th century. This manuscript contains a vast store of genealogical and historical information. It has been carefully preserved and is now kept in the library of the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin.

Among the most famous manuscripts associated with the Mac Egans is the **Leabhar Breac**, or Speckled Book of the Mac Egans. This was commissioned and written for one of the family by another bardic scholar and scribe from Ormond, Murchadh Riabhach O'Cuindlis. This manuscript was attributed for centuries to scribes of the Mac Egan family, who owned it. However, by a careful study of the handwriting in 1973, Professor Tomás O'Concheanainn of University College Dublin identified the scribe as Murchadh O'Cuindlis.

He had been a student at the Mac Firbis bardic school in Co. Sligo, and carried out his work on the Leabhar Breac between Christmas 1408 and Halloween 1411. Names mentioned in it include a man named Domhnall and another named Mághnus Mac Egan. This might just have been the Mághnus Mac Egan who was Prior of the monastery of Sligo, and who died in 1411. Places mentioned in the scribe's notes indicate that he wrote most of the work in Ormond, where he refers to Cluain Leathan (which may have later become known as Ballymacegan), Redwood, and Lough Rea.

The book contains 142 leaves and it is the largest surviving vellum manuscript that is known to have been the work of a single scribe. It contains a wealth of religious biography or hagiographical and historical material dealing with the lives of the saints, and it contains an account of the consecration of a church. It has all the earmarks of a work undertaken on behalf of a cleric or religious community. The book was kept at the Mac Egan school at Duniry in County Galway for hundreds of years, from which it came to be known originally as the Great Book of Duniry. This name was later changed during the 19th century. It is now preserved in the library of the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin, where it was deposited in 1789.

Also known as the Book of The O'Kellys, the manuscript called Leabhar Uí Maine or the **Book of Uí Maine** contains historical information about the origins and genealogy of the Mac Egan family. Several of them have added notes and signatures to it, although the book was originally written by Faelán Mac an Gabhann and other scribes for Muircheartach O'Kelly. He was the Bishop of Clonfert and became Archbishop of Tuam before his death in 1409. The manuscript contains a variety of historical and genealogical material. It is now in the library of the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin.

Another famous manuscript is known as the **Yellow Book of Lecan**. This in fact consists of a collection of sixteen separate manuscripts, and represents the remains of the library of one of the most famous bardic schools in the country. This was the school of the Mac Firbis family at Lacken, near Enniscrone, in County Sligo. One of the largest of these sixteen books is a copy of the text known as the Book of Ollamhs. It was a text book for use by advanced students in the bardic schools. This manuscript was written by Aedh O'Davoren at the Mac Egan bardic school at Park in County Galway in 1408. It contains some notes and comments that allow us a tantalising glimpse of life at one of these Mac Egan bardic schools in the fifteenth century. The manuscript is now in the library of Trinity College Dublin.

Another manuscript written at the Mac Egan law school at Park is known as **O'Davoren's Law Glossary**. It was written for Donal O'Davoren in 1569. The scribes included Anluan Mac Egan and the grandfather of the famous Duaid Mac Firbis, also named Duaid, from Lecan near Enniscrone, who was then a student at the Mac Egan school. Once again, the comments jotted down by the scribes and students allow us to see the world of the bardic scholar at work. The manuscript is a dictionary of difficult and obsolete terms and their explanation. It is now preserved in the British Library in London.

In common with many other bardic families, we can find references to further texts and manuscripts associated with the Mac Egans, but which appear to have been lost with the passage of time down the centuries. These include:

- Leabhar Dubh Mhic Aodhagáin** - The Black Book of the Mac Egans
- Leabhar Rua Mhic Aodhagáin** - The Red Book of the Mac Egans
- Leabhar Breac Mhic Aodhagáin** - The Speckled Book of the Mac Egans.

This last item is not to be confused with the other manuscript of the same name, which was originally known as the Great Book of Duniry.

SOME MANUSCRIPTS ASSOCIATED WITH MAC EGANS

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We can be sure that the following list of manuscripts contains all that remains of the libraries once used by the brehon law schools of the Mac Egans at Park, Duniry and Ballymacegan.

ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY:

1223, D.IV.2 Written at Kilcormic in Offaly 15th C

1230, The Leabhar Breac, Murchadh Riabhach O'Cuindlis 1408-1411

1237, D.I.1 Conor Mac Egan

1242,

1243, Law Duniry 1475-1577

E.IV.4, Genealogy

D.I.3, Genealogy of 1644 written by Pilib O'Duigenan for Seán Mac Egan

536, Book of Ballymote 1384 and later

1225, Book of Uí Maine 1394 and later contains Mac Egan genealogy

1233, Leabhar Donn 15th C contains Mac Egan genealogy

BRITISH LIBRARY:

Eg. 88, O'Davoren's Law Glossary 1569

Eg. 139, Seán O'Neachtain poems to Fr. Pól Mac Egan 1707

Eg. 181, owned by Fr. Donnchadh Mac Egan in 1709

Add. Ms. 4783, Law ms. signed by Tadhg Mac Egan late 15th C

ROYAL LIBRARY STOCKHOLM:

Vit. Eng. II, Judgement of Eolus O'Mulconry and Cairbre Mac Egan, 1587

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN:

1316, Senchus Már 1350 Lucas O'Dallain, Aedh Mac Egan, Cairbre & others

1317, Glossaries Flann

1318, The Yellow Book of Lecan part written at Park in 1408

1337, 14th/15th C written at Park in 1464

1336, 15th C - 1577 Seán, Cairbre, Aodhagáin Mac Egan

1363, 15th/16th C Cosnamhach, Baethgalach Finn of Ormond, Saerbrethach

1387, Laws

1433, Laws, Book of Aicill, Fergus Mac Egan, before 1442

Chapter 8 **Genealogy and Family Tree**

Geinealaigh Clainne Aodhagáin

There appear to have been several distinct periods of development in the genealogical field of seanchas or historical study in Ireland. What was probably the first genealogical scheme for the whole country was apparently written in the middle of the 8th century. It was called the Seanchus Coiteann or general knowledge. This was transmitted from one manuscript to another, further information being added, until another updated compilation was put together at the ancient monastery of Armagh about the end of the 10th century. The genealogies were updated again in the first half of the 12th century, and once again in the 14th century, this time by bardic scholars. The final great genealogical collections date from the 17th century. Information was being continuously added all the while. The vast majority of the Irish genealogies have still to be published in a modern format. The task of collating them with the annals and other sources is a formidable one, which still needs to be undertaken.

The genealogy of the Mac Egans is probably only reliable back to about the year 1100. This is a feature of the genealogies of bardic families in general, they are not as extensive nor as ancient as those of the rulers who patronised them. It seems as if the bardic families spent most of their efforts on preserving information about their patrons' families and had relatively little regard for their own. As to the example given here - it consists of part of the outline family tree of the Mac Egan family. This indicates how complicated the ramifications of one family could become and where different sections of the family branch off from the main stem. Just as I felt that I should not re-invent the wheel by covering ground already well covered in "The History of Clan Egan", I have refrained from slavishly copying the Mac Egan genealogy in full. This was published in Irish in the book "Measgra Mhichíl Uí Chléirigh" by Kathleen Mulchrone in 1944. The sources she used included the 15th century Leabhar Donn and the 14th century Leabhar Uí Mhaine, as well as other manuscripts. As mentioned earlier, she was not able to consult the original manuscripts for some of her work and so the genealogy needs to be re-edited and re-published. The surviving genealogy appears to be based on a copy that was originally written down in the early 14th century. I have supplemented the information given with references from documents such as the

Funeral Entries and other sources.

When the published facsimile of the Book of Uí Maine is examined, some differences in details recorded in the genealogy become apparent. The manuscript indicates that there were at least three phases in the recording of the Mac Egan genealogy. The earliest version was apparently written down at the beginning of the 14th century. The bulk of the genealogy written in the Book of Uí Maine was written in the first quarter of the 15th century. This gives details on the Mac Egans of Clanrickard and Ormond. Finally, there is a section that appears to be an addition which dates to the middle of the 16th century, dealing with the Mac Egans of Ormond. That there is certainly a great deal more which could be researched and added to this aspect of the family history should be obvious from the outline given here.

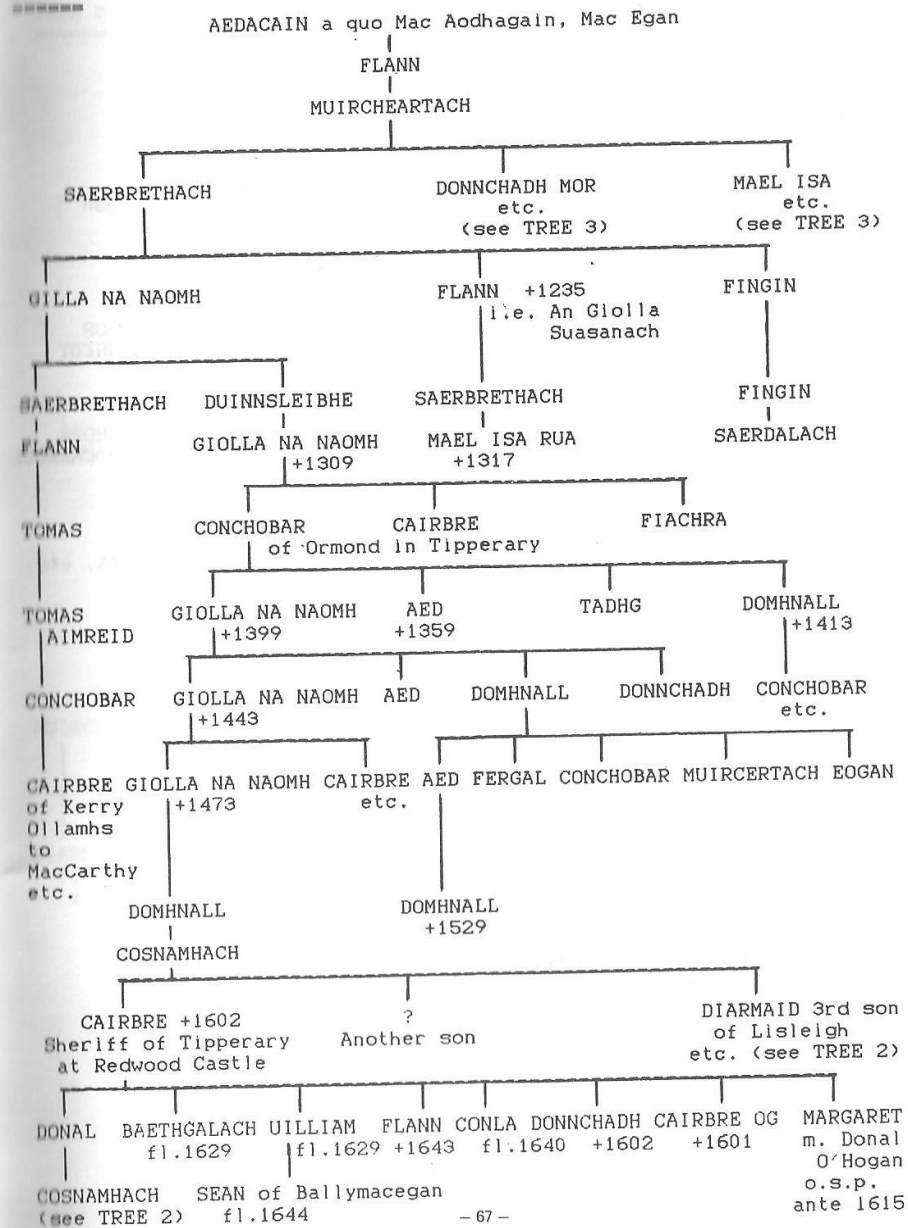
There were at least five main centres of the Mac Egan family. Their original home was in Uí Maine, about the castle at Park in Co. Galway. One branch of the family maintained a famous law school there, particularly in the period from about 1400 to 1580 or so. Another branch settled in Tíreragh about the middle of the 14th century, but these seem to have died out after a hundred years or so, and their function as judges and lawyers was probably taken over by the Mac Fírbis family. Another branch were settled around the castle of Duniry in Clanrickard where they were renowned as judges in the later 16th century. This branch of the family owned the famous manuscript called the Leabhar Breac, which was then known under the title of The Great Book of Duniry. A fourth branch lived at Ballymacegan and at the castle of Redwood and other places in Ormond (North Tipperary). These also ran a law school, which was particularly renowned in the first half of the 17th century. Yet another branch settled about Pallis near Killarney in Co. Kerry at the end of the 16th century, and were probably related to the Mac Egan ollamhs of the Mac Carthys. There were many other branches of the family settled at various places about the country.

As indicated in an earlier chapter some genealogical information on these other branches can be gleaned from surviving documents, particularly government records from the 17th century. This has been done to produce the short family trees for several branches of the Mac Egans. Very little is known about these branches, and their existence can only be gleaned from such scattered references. Eighteenth and nineteenth century

records have also been used by Dr. Michael J.S. Egan and Herr Claus von Egan Krieger to research the genealogy, but this period falls outside the scope of this book.

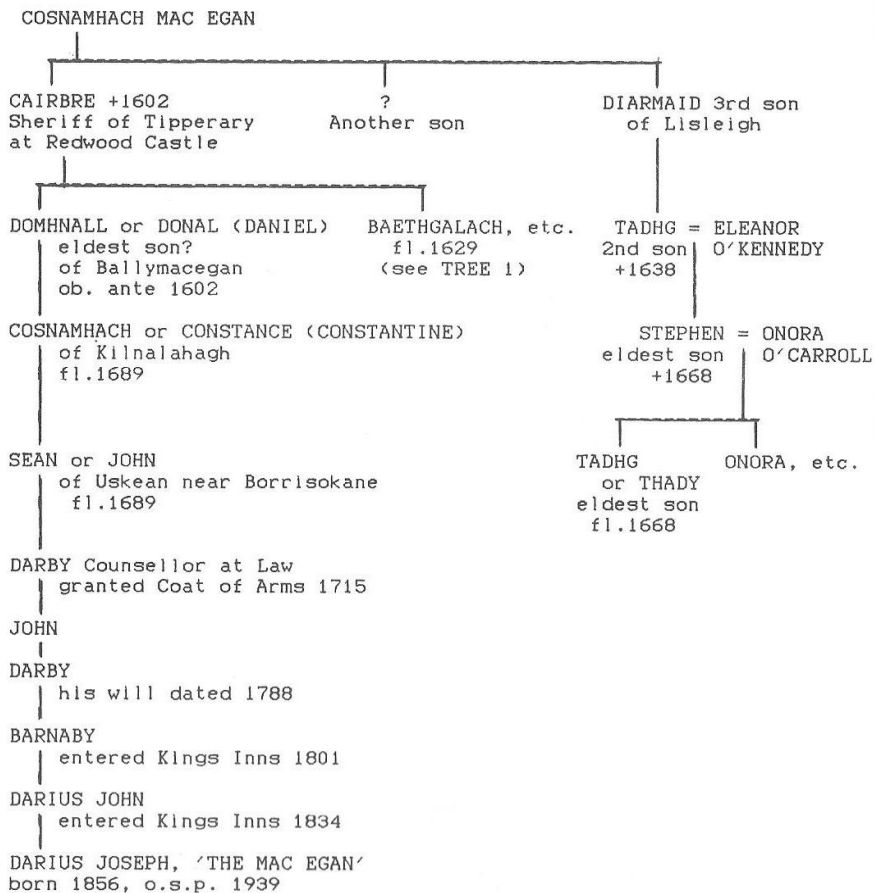
OUTLINE OF THE MAC EGAN FAMILY GENEALOGY
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TREE 1:
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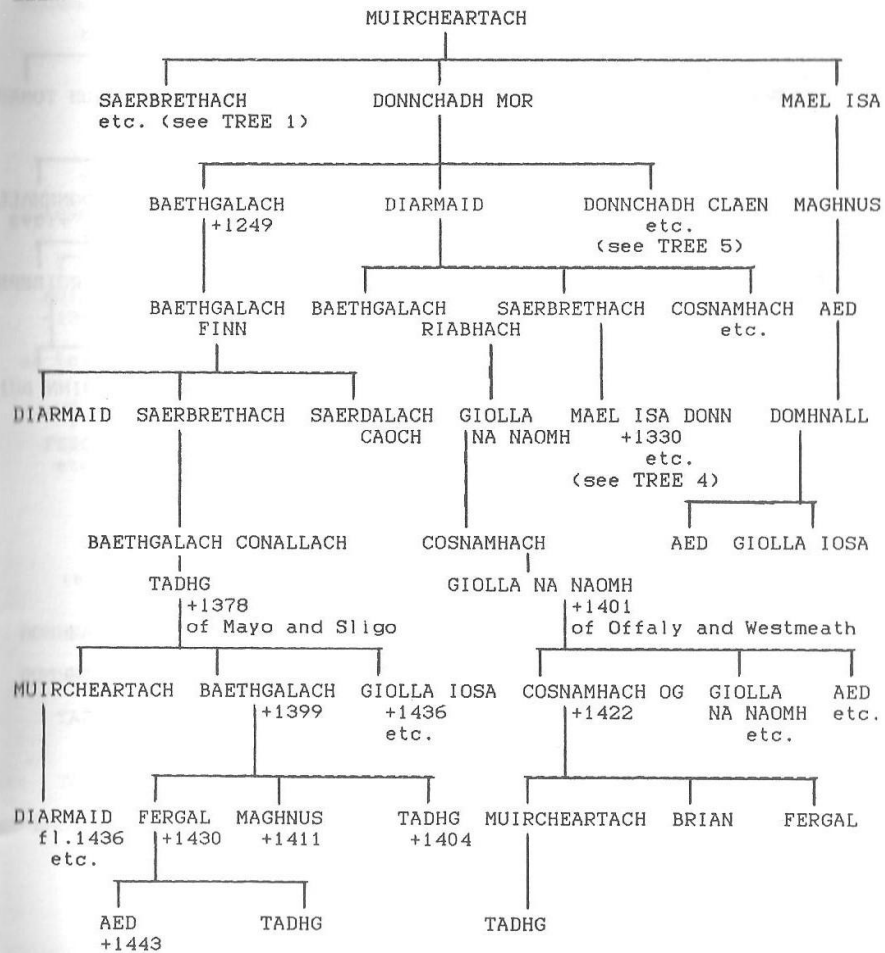
TREE 2:

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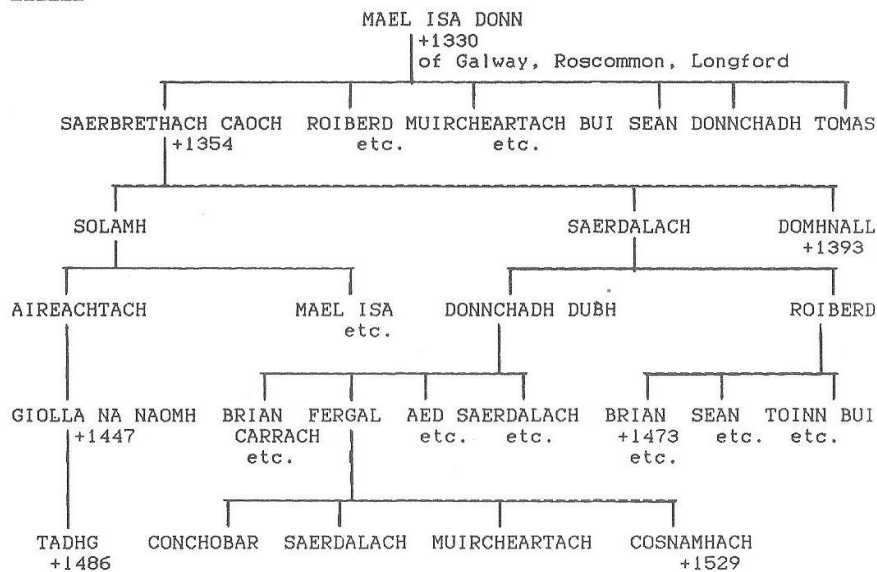
TREE 3:

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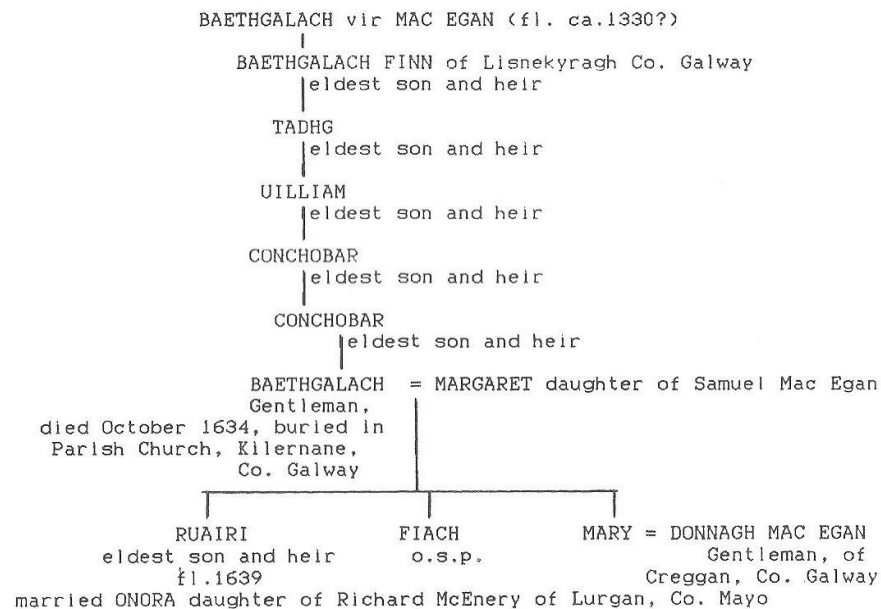


TREE 4:

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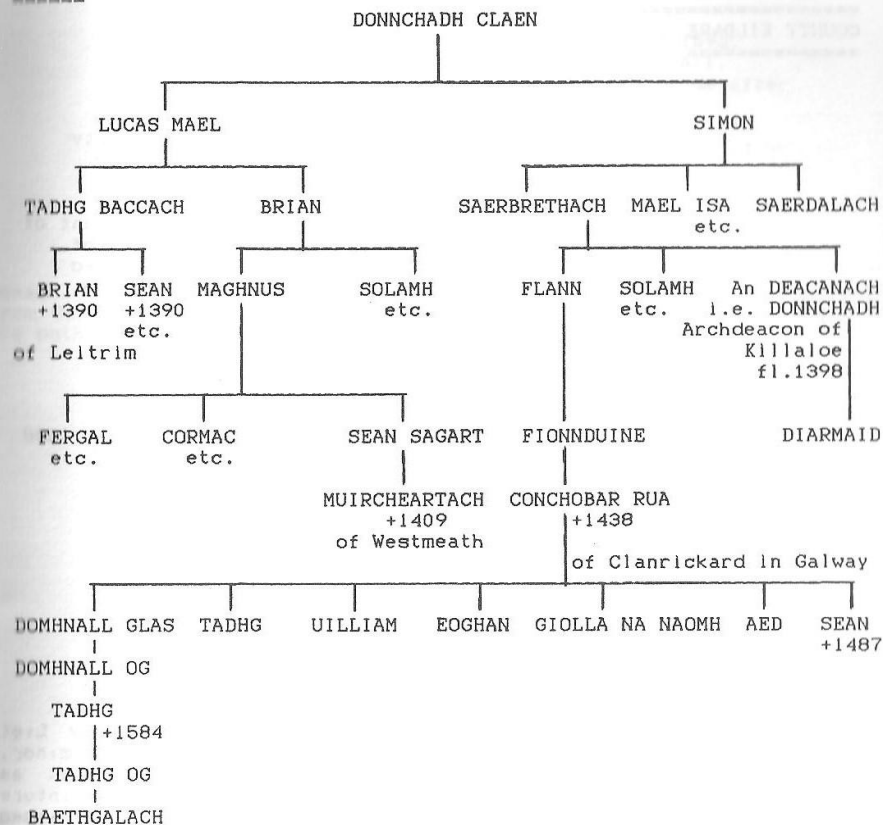


The Funeral Entries contain this pedigree, which may belong here:



TREE 5:

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MISCELLANEOUS MAC EGAN GENEALOGIES

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COUNTY KILDARE

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PATRICK MAC EGAN

of Ballinderry, Kilcandragh
obtained a grant of property
including 60 acres of land
from John Bermingham
14th May 1609
He may have been a descendant of
Patrick Mac Egan, brehon, of
Ballinderry, who was granted
English liberty in May 1548.

DANIEL

CONLAN or CONLEY

born 1598. living 20th Mar. 1638
and married

?

THOMAS of Ballinderry, Gent.

married Margaret Brennan
outlaw Jacobite in 1691

DANIEL

living in 1703

According to Dalton's 2nd Edition of King James' Irish Army List (1860), at the Court of Chichester House, Daniel Egan, a minor, claimed by his guardian an estate tail in Co. Kildare lands, as forfeited by Thomas Egan. Margaret Egan claimed a small jointure thereof, and Elizabeth, Mary and Anne Egan, their daughters, claimed also by their guardians portions of £100 for each thereof. All these petitions were dismissed and Thomas's estate in Co. Kildare was sold in 1703 by the Commissioners of Forfeitures to William Hewetson of Clough, Co. Kildare.

In the Civil Survey of 1656, Daniel Keigan, Irish Papist, is listed as owning one quarter of a ploughland (163 acres) at Ballinderry and William Huetson, Protestant, is listed as owning one half quarter of a ploughland (145 acres) at Clonuffe in Co. Kildare.

COUNTY WESTMEATH

=====

PATRICK MAC EGAN

of Ballynegall
obtained lands from
James Bermingham in 1592.
He married Joan Tyrrell,
who inherited his lands after
his death in 1627.
She died 1st Nov. 1631 and
the property was inherited by
her son and heir.

CONLY

born 1580

living, and married, 27th May 1640

Donagh Kegan of Ballynegall obtained a grant of lands at Gortumull from Gerald Tyrrell on 5th March 1632. Graine Keggan and Joan Keygan are both mentioned as owning property in Mullingar in 1609.

MURTAGH MAC EGAN

of Moyrath and Monsyuttagh
died 12th Nov. 1635

MURTAGH OG

born 1625
Judged to be an Innocent Papist
in 1676, and restored to 479 acres
at Lissenoid, Tonlemony, Leantogher
granted to him during 99 years
in 1649

?

BRIAN

living 1691

Murtagh Keegan of Lissnoyd, Gent. and Bryan Keegan of Lissnoyd, Gent. are listed as Jacobite outlaws in 1691.

COUNTY LONGFORD

=====

PATRICK MAC EGAN

of Ballymacegan, probably the same
man who was appointed seneschal of
of Carrickbeg, Ballymahon, in 1591
In 1619, Anlone & Patrick McKegan
were granted 344 acres of land.
Patrick died 1st June 1622.

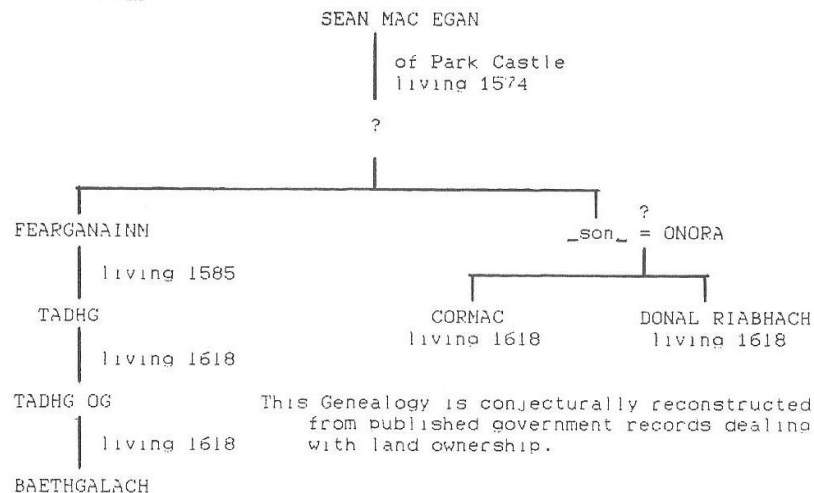
DERMOT

born 1592

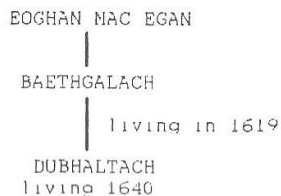
living, and married, 1st August 1627

COUNTY GALWAY

THE MAC EGANS OF PARK



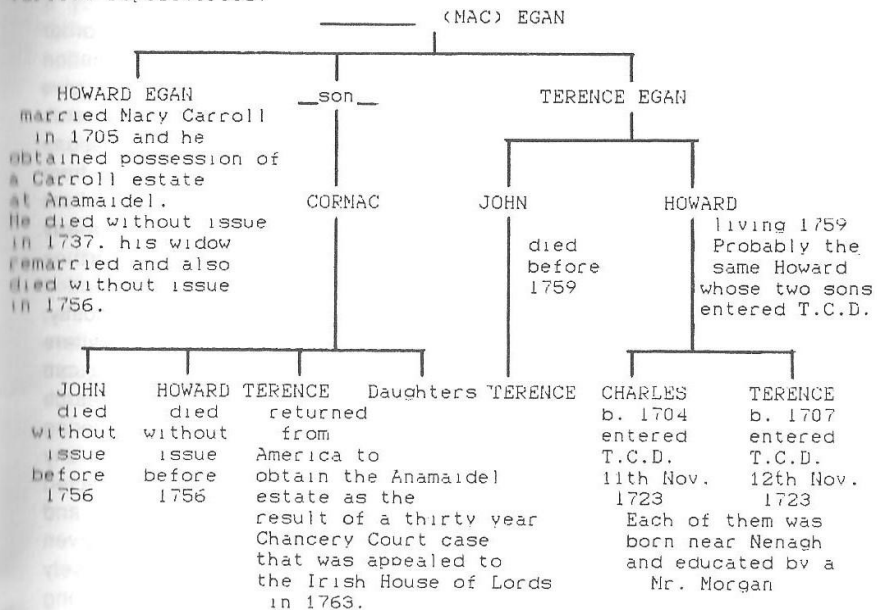
Another branch of the Mac Egans were settled at Granshagh in the parish of Kilclooney, Barony of ClooneMacNowne where this descent is given:



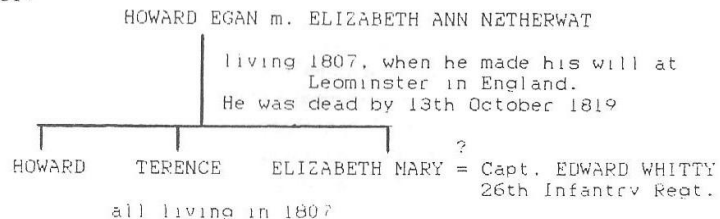
COUNTY TIPPERARY

THE EGANS OF ANAMAIDEL

The Following genealogy is reconstructed from information contained in the published records of a chancery court case that was in progress for more than thirty years, together with records of students attending T.C.D., and a will recorded in the Registry of Deeds. The court case was settled after an appeal to the House of Lords, and the published decision and synopsis in the National Library of Iceland were brought to my attention by Dr. M.J.S. Egan of Dublin. Although this genealogy falls just outside the period of this book, it offers a good example of how much information still remains on record in various repositories.



One of these last four, living in 1763, was probably the father or grandfather of:



In 1667, the Hearth Money Rolls for Tipperary record a Conchoore Heagan of Barnane, parish of Ahnimiddle.

Tracing Your Roots in Ireland

Having read the rest of this book you now have some idea of the kind of information available about the Mac Egan family from medieval times. In working backwards from modern times the first priority is to get as much information as possible from your own immediate family. It is reasonably easy to trace your direct lineage back to the middle of the last century. It is in going further back that luck can play a large role.

Birth, marriage and death certificates are very useful. However, in order to obtain the right copies, you need to have fairly detailed information about names, dates and addresses. A birth certificate will usually give parents names and addresses. This can be used to find the parents marriage certificate, which will normally give the names and occupations of both grandfathers. The names of grandmothers can be discovered from the parents birth certificates, and so on. More information can be had from headstone inscriptions, but this can often prove difficult as many graveyards are neglected. Headstone hunting is normally a winter sport!

Tracking down particular individuals can prove time consuming and costly, and you may have to plan out your strategy beforehand. This is where published guides to the sources can prove invaluable. Of course, you can always engage the services of a professional, and pay for the research that is required, but most of the enjoyment to be had lies in discovering for yourself the story of your own personal ancestors. There is hardly any greater sense of joy to be had than in discovering some long neglected document, which may have lain buried in a repository for many years, and which was once in the hands of one of your very own lineal ancestors. Even if it refers to some shameful or tragic episode, it can bring an intensely personal sense of belonging. Some people can in fact have a very strong emotional experience as a result of this.

Sources of public information have come to be largely sited in Dublin, although many local and county libraries now have much greater access to copies of source material. The main institutions in Dublin are The National Library of Ireland, The Genealogical Office, The General Register Office, The National Archives (the Public Record Office and State Paper Office), and The Registry of Deeds. The Land Commission records are still not available to the general public, although an index can be consulted in The National Library.

The staff in these institutions are always very helpful, but it is only sensible to know beforehand what exactly you wish to find out in order to get the full benefit of their attention and advice. They can sometimes be under pressure due to the huge demand for information, and the facilities available to them can be very limited. Heritage Centres have now been set up in many of the counties of Ireland, and these are building up a store of useful information.

If you are just starting, a consultation with the staff of the Genealogical Office is well worth the small fee charged. You need to make an appointment in advance at the office in Kildare street in Dublin. Joining an organisation such as Comhchaidreamh Muinntir Aodhagáin or the Clan Egan Association can also be a very worthwhile investment, for access to experienced researchers and advice. If you engage a professional researcher you should first be clear in your aims and instructions to him or her so that you will get the full value for the fees you will be charged. Researchers generally do earn their money, as genealogical research can sometimes be very time-consuming and tiresome to say the least. As a hobby it is interesting and fulfilling and can help you create a part of your own family's heritage that your children and grandchildren will cherish and appreciate. Most of all, it can be a very enjoyable experience, even though there is some expense and hard work involved! Good luck with your efforts, slán agus beannacht ón údar!

Do críochnaíodh an obair seo, iar mór shaothar agus dúthracht, i nAtha Cliath Duibhlinne, an seachtú lá de mhí Bealtaine, 'san mbliain d'aois ár dTiarna 1990, le Conchobhar, mac Shéamuis, mhic Phádraig, mhic Mhichíl, mhic Phádraig Mhic Éil; agus má gheibheann an léitheoir ní inbhéime inti, creideadh sé gur thar dhícheall an fhir friotail do chuaigh; agus cuimhníodh lucht a h-inchreachta nach bhfuil obair dhaonna faoin ngrian saor ó lochta, agus gur minic do hinchreachadh deá-shaothar go h-éagórach trí fhoramad agus mhioscais n-eascairde, agus fós trína n-aineolas.