

## The Ancient Law School of Park, Co. Galway

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By THOMAS B. COSTELLO, M.D., M.R.I.A.

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PARK CASTLE, lying about twelve miles from Tuam and six from Glenamaddy, is now completely ruined. Only a corner of the keep, about 20 feet high, and extensive mounds where formerly outbuildings stood, remain to mark the site of what was for centuries the home of a family of the Egans (in Irish Mac Aodhagáin) who had a school of law here and were Brehons to the neighbouring chieftains.

The castle, with its surrounding buildings, stood about the centre of a small sheltered and pleasant valley surrounded on all sides by high esker hills, with a small stream of clear water running through it, which flowed through the castle grounds. The land in the valley is about the best in the barony.

The Mac Aodhagáin family were famous Brehons and Lawgivers to many of the princely families in Munster and Connacht, holding land in many parts of these provinces in reward for these services.

The Egans (I will call them by the modern anglicised form of the name), can trace their descent from early Irish kings and their pedigrees are recorded in old Irish books, such as the Book of Lecan, and Mac Firbis Genealogies. Some of these pedigrees are quoted in O'Donovan's edition of the *Tribes and Customs of Hymany*, in which territory the castle of Park lies.

In Munster, the Egans were Brehons to McCarthy, and others of the name held land in North Tipperary down to our own day.

In Connacht they were Brehons to the O'Connors, and in the time of Cathal Cróibhdearg in the early 13th century, they had 24 townlands in payment for the office they discharged.

In County Galway, their most famous school was in Duniry

near Portumna. Here was written the great book known as the *Leabhar Breac* about the end of the fourteenth century. O'Curry in his *Manuscript Materials of Irish History*, gives details of its contents, and says of the religious items in it, that it is the most important repertory of our ancient ecclesiastical and theological writings in existence.

In Park also there must have been a considerable library of manuscripts, many of which are still preserved in the British Museum, Trinity College, Dublin, and elsewhere.

Scholars came to these schools to copy and bring away some of the scarce manuscripts kept there, and it was the custom also for the pupils to copy the manuscripts, and while doing so, they often made notes and remarks in the margins of the material on which they wrote (generally vellum), and these marginalia give interesting information of the mode of life of the pupils and when and where they were working. In this way, many of the manuscripts that remain can be proved to have been written in Park. For instance there is a MS. in Trinity College Dublin Library (MS. H 3. 18) which has notes at the foot of two of its pages (page 443 and 450) which states that the Scribe was writing at Park. The note at page 450 has been translated as follows :

"Today is the dies after Lady Day, and for myself, through Mary's intercession, I implore the mercy of God, for I feel 'anyhow,' and I think still more since the 'one that makes us jump' lies in fever, and I having to cross the Shannon tomorrow. I am at Pairc 1464."

Among the marginal notes in Egerton 88 in the British Museum, several allude to Park and to places in its neighbourhood. Many of these are recorded and translated in the *Catalogue of Irish MSS. in the British Museum* compiled by Standish H. O'Grady. Thus on p. 110 of the *Catalogue* he quotes a scribe's note ending :

". . . 'Tis in Tuam we are the Tuesday . . ."

Page 111.

"This is the eve of Ladyday in Spring. . . The Park is my quarters. [Written by] Manus for Donall, who is himself travelling áll over Ireland. A.D. 1567.

Page 112.

"It is Saturday and here at Park."

On page 112 is also quoted a marginal note written by Annluan McEgan and mention is made of a quatrain made by Manus O'Davoren for [*i.e.* on] William Ruadh McEgan.

Page 114.

Mention is made in a note of the Viceroy going to Dunmore.

Page 120.

There is quoted a long note ending : " Park is the place in which I scribble."

Page 121.

" In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost this [is begun] by Manus, on S. John's Eve, at Park."

Page 122.

" An end of this stave by Manus, my location being at Park."

Page 123.

There is quoted a long note written by the scribe Donall who evidently returned to his room to find that it had been " tidied up." :

" That's from Donall for himself ; and should any man find fault with it I myself will excuse him [for doing so]. My curse, and God's into the bargain, I bestow on the women that have muddled up together all that I possessed in the way of ink, of colours, and of books. God's curse on him too that shall read this and fail to curse them [the women]. My God, this is a wretched piece of business. Ochone for it ! "

On the succeeding folio there is in another hand :

" I'm not the woman Donall."

Page 128.

" You are well off Donall, to be getting in the harvest and I slaving for you. This is Aedh. I am located at the Park."

Page 129. There is quoted a quatrain :

" Were I every day to go to Park, there I should find Teigue and the noble Conn, that never would desist from running after the women : at Tuaim árd is my place of refuge."

One of these manuscripts was published by Whitley Stokes in 1862 with Cormac's Glossary and another under the title *Three Irish Glossaries*. He calls it O'Davoren's Glossary though it was written in Park as it begins :

“ Mei est incipere dei est infinire .i.

Domnall ó dhubh dha boirenn in aine iar feil bri[gh]de  
1569 ocus ar in pairc atu.”

Many other of these manuscripts, particularly the well-known Egerton 88 in the British Museum, have notes by several O'Davorens though they mention that they were written in Park, and often name neighbouring places.

The O'Davorens were Brehons and Ollamhs to the O'Loghlens in Burren, Co. Clare, from the fourteenth century. They kept a law school in Cahermaghnaughton, an ancient caher lying between Kilfenora and Ballyvaughan. They held land in many parts of North Clare, but were never a large family like the Mac Aodhagáins. There is no evidence whatever that they had a school in Park. Every document relating to Park that has come down to us proves that Park was always held by the Egans, so that the O'Davorens as students merely copied the works of the Egans stored in Park.

In the list of castles in Co. Galway drawn up by Edward White, clerk of the Council, and sent to Lord Burghley on the 27 March 1574, the castle of Park is mentioned as belonging to Seaghán Mac Aodhgáin, Tadhg úi Ceallaigh being chief of Hymany, in whose territory Park was situated.

In the *Tribes and Customs of Hymany* by John O'Donovan the editor prints a document in Irish and gives a translation of it. The document is on parchment, and was in the possession of James Hardiman, author of the *History of Galway*, in 1842. It concerns the settling of a dispute about land held by the O'Mannions and is dated the Friday before Whitsuntide 1584, in the castle of Mullaghmore owned by one of the O'Kellys.

The district occupied by the O'Mannions is only a mile or so from Mullaghmore. At an Inquisition taken at Galway before John Crofton on the first of April 1585, William O'Mannion was in possession of the townlands of Coolourta and Dryseghán in the Barony of Tyaquin and country of Hymany. These townlands, now called Cooloorty and Brierfield, adjoin the public road between Moylough and Barnaderg. In both these places there are ruins of O'Kelly castles.

The document was drawn up by Baothghalach son of Flaithgheal Mac Egan. These names commonly occur among the Egan family of Park, and as Mullaghmore castle was



Archbishop Boetius Egan

A.D. 1734-1798.



House in Dunblancy built in 1787 for Archbishop Boetius Egan. The room marked with a † is where he died.







Inscription on Stone from Park Castle.



distant 7 miles from Park, this document was most probably written by a MacEgan of Park.

In the *Composition of Connacht* recently published by the Irish MSS. Commission, there is an account of an Inquisition taken at Galway on the 25 day of August in the yeare of our Lord God 1585. It relates to the owners of lands in the Barony of Bealamoe (Ballymoe). Among the landholders occurs the name of Forgenanen McKegan of the Parke [*recte* Fear gan Ainm Mac Aodhgáin]. Only one Egan is given as possessing Park in this list, which was in accordance with the new Norman Law, and was supposed to supersede the Brehon Laws in these parts. Yet, on the 28 November, 1618, 16th of James I, the following extract from the *Patent Rolls of Chancery Ireland*, p. 414, shows that in the entry for the half barony of Ballymoe, county of Galway, the Mac Egans still held Park under the Brehon Law. Thus:

“ To Teige oge McKegan and Teige McFergananim McKegan of Parke :  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the Castle of Parke, and  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the quarter of the Parke :  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the  $\frac{1}{2}$  quarter of Tuamard.

“ To said Teige oge McKegan  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the Castle of Parke :  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the  $\frac{1}{2}$  quarter of Tuamaduan.

“ To Cormack McKeegan of Parke :  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the Castle of Parke :  $\frac{1}{5}$  of the  $\frac{1}{2}$  quarter of Tuamard.

“ To Donald Revagh [riabhach, *i.e.* the swarthy] McKegan of Parke :  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the castle of Parke :  $\frac{1}{5}$  of the  $\frac{1}{2}$  quarter of Tuamard.

“ To Flahell McKeegan of Parke :  $\frac{1}{5}$  of the 1 quarter of Parke :  $\frac{1}{9}$  of  $\frac{1}{2}$  quarter of Tuamard, and a *stone house* within the bawn of Parke Castle.

“ To Honor ny Kegan, widow :  $\frac{1}{12}$  of the quarter of Parke, and  $\frac{1}{12}$  of the half of the  $\frac{1}{2}$  quarter of Tuamard.

“ To Ferdoragh McKegan of Parke :  $\frac{1}{12}$  of a quarter of Parke, and  $\frac{1}{12}$  of the  $\frac{1}{2}$  quarter of Tuamard.”

That the Egans must have felt secure in their possession of Park is shown by a building which was erected by the Cormac McEgan mentioned in the foregoing grant.

This is proved by a stone with inscription, which still exists, though for over a hundred years it was thought lost, but the inscription was remembered in the locality, and the Ordnance Survey Letters of 1837 gave a fairly accurate

description of it though it was not seen. The late Dr. George McNamara in an account of the O'Davorens published in the *Journal* of the North Munster Archæological Society in 1912 gives a description of it by Mr. John Diskin Lerhin, N.S., which is adjacent to Parke. According to Mr. Diskin, the stone disappeared about the end of the 19th century, but about the year 1936, Father Michael Godwin who was then curate in the parish, found the stone in the farmyard of Mr. P. Kilmartin in Timard, a townland adjoining Park, and which belonged to the Egans. He brought it to the parochial residence in Clonberne for its future preservation.

The stone, which most probably formed part of a door lintel, is of the native limestone, about 3 ft. 2 ins. long on top, and narrowing to about 2 ft. 6 ins. at the bottom, 14 ins. deep and 6 ins. in thickness. It is neatly bevelled top and bottom, but parts of both sides have been broken off.

The inscription is in three panels. The one on the left, as one faces the stone, has the date 1627, and beneath, a religious symbol. The middle panel is complete and reads :

Cormac Ma	[Cormac MacAodagain do rinne an
caodagain	obair so aois an Tigearna m]
do rinne an o	[Cormac Mac Aodagain that made
bair so Aois an	this work at the time of the age of
Tiagarna m	the Lord]

The inscription on the right-hand panel is not complete, and reads from below upwards :

in tan so m[ile]	[one thousand six hundred
bl[iadan] se-c[hed]	and (twenty seven)]

The upper line is obscure, but must be "fiche a seacht."

The letters of the inscription are raised, as was the custom of the time, and their neatness is admired by all Celtic scholars who have read the inscription.

But the Egans were not as secure in their possessions as they thought, for later on in the century they lost all their estates, as did most of the old Irish Catholic families in the troubled years that soon followed. Park Castle was abandoned and soon fell into ruin, though much of the keep and many outbuildings remained until late in the 19th century.

Though they were driven from Park, some of the family took up their residence two or three miles away, nearer

Dunmore at a place called Dunblaney. They lived, not in a castle like Park which resembled the castles of the Norman Burkes who had castles all around that neighbourhood, but in a long low thatched house with many farm buildings around it.

They lived here much as their forefathers lived in Park, surrounded by retainers, and getting their food and raiment from their lands and from the industry of their work people, spinning, weaving, grinding corn, and so on. They owned a large green on which the linen was bleached and the house where the apples were stored and the cider made is still pointed out by the present occupiers, though the building is now put to other uses.

Their greatest wealth, however, consisted in livestock, and they farmed extensively.

In the eighteenth century, two brothers lived and brought up their families in peace and harmony under one roof. Another brother who was intended for the Church was sent to the South of France to be educated and ordained. He returned to Connacht in 1785. He became Bishop of Achonry, and on the death of Archbishop Phillips, he was translated to the See of Tuam as Archbishop in 1787.

Now though there was in the town of Tuam a chapel where Mass was publicly celebrated in Chapel Lane, no Catholic Archbishop had resided in the town since Cromwellian times. Thus it was that Archbishop Egan decided to reside in Dunblaney with the other members of his family. In preparation for his coming, a two storeyed slated building was added to the house on the South side, and in this rather humble dwelling he resided and carried on the work of the archdiocese until his death, which occurred suddenly nine years later. He died in the room he used as a study and was buried in Clonberne amongst his ancestors.

Though the Law School of Park was no more, and the Egans had ceased to teach, the Archbishop had lived to see a far greater school arise in Ireland, as the College of Maynooth was founded while he was Archbishop of Tuam, and his name figures as one of the original Trustees in its Charter.

Archbishop Boetius Egan's name in Irish would be Baothghlach Mac Aodhagáin, and there were numerous bearers of that name among the Egans, bishops and scholars. It was

to one of that name who was Bishop of Elphin that Brother Michael O'Cleary, the chief compiler of the *Annals of the Four Masters* dedicates a *printed* vocabulary of Irish words which was published in Louvain in 1643. In the dedication, O'Cleary says that one of the chief authorities he followed was a full namesake of the Bishop, Boetius Roe (ruadh) Mac Egan.

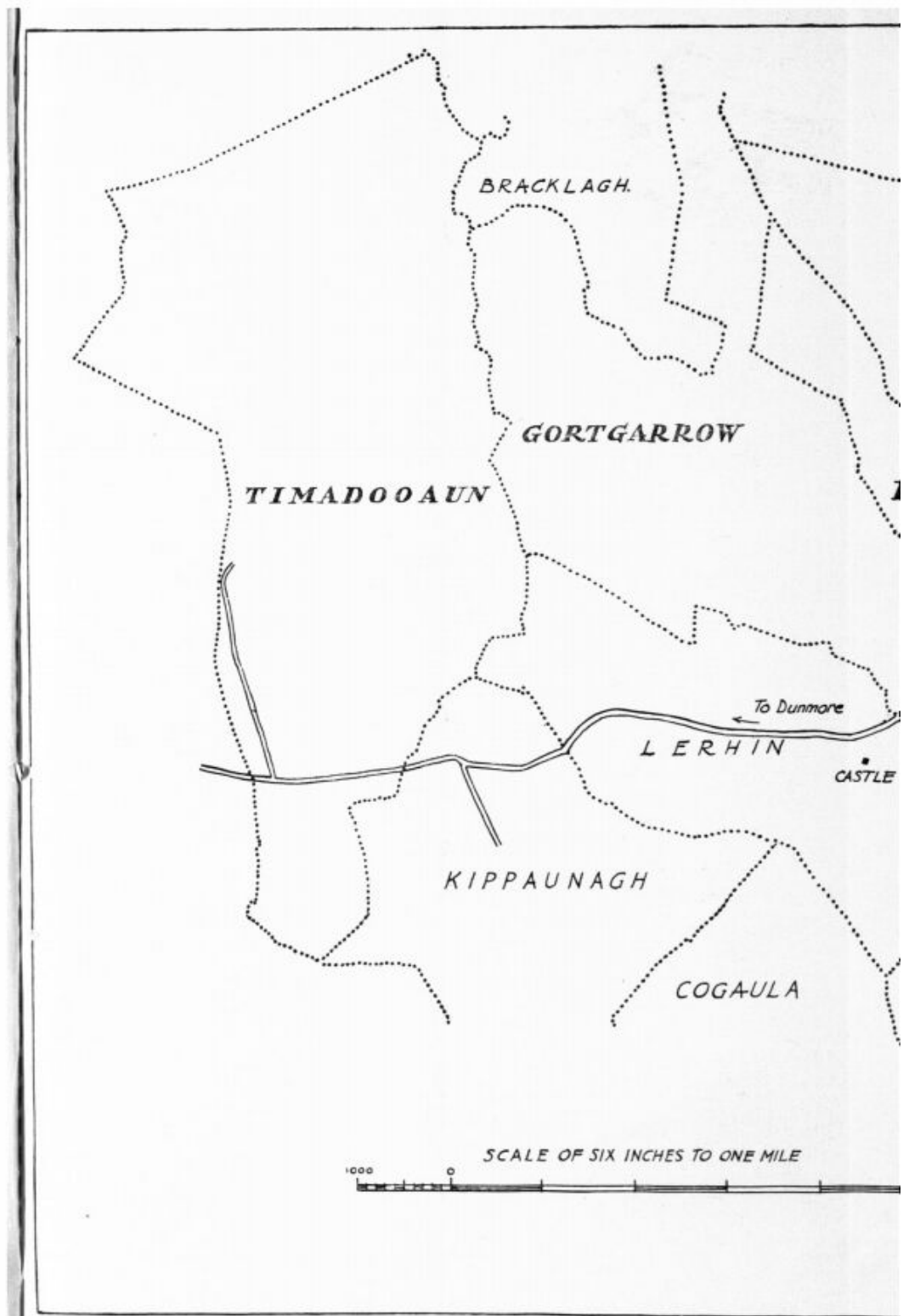
The anglicised form of the name is Bowes, and it is still sometimes used in this county by the Egans and by the Dalys, another learned family.

The last Egan to occupy Dunblaney, left there in the early nineteenth century and came to live in Tuam, where he died an old and very wealthy man in the house now used as a Civic Guard Barracks.

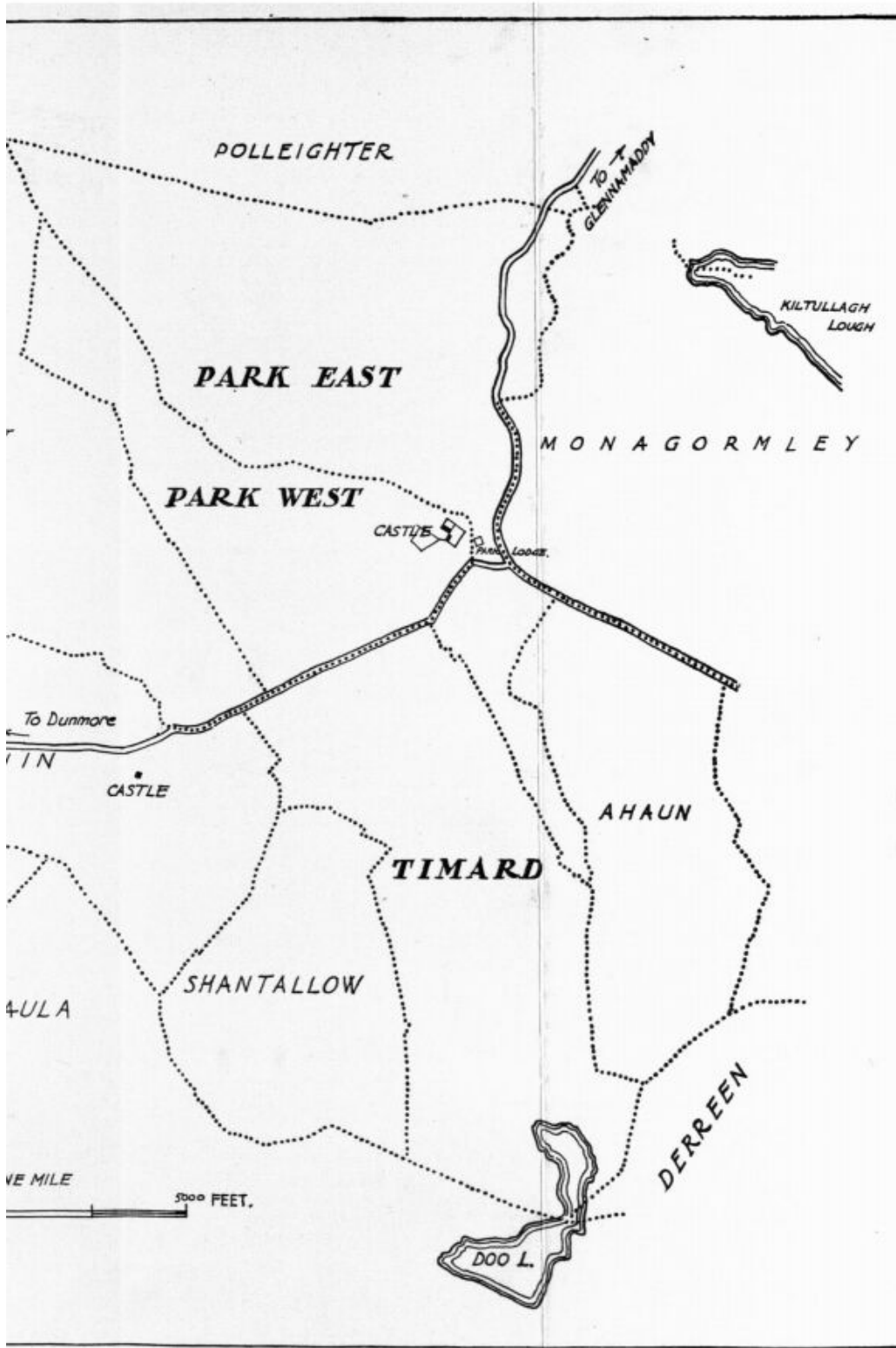
A nephew of the Archbishop was Surgeon in the 4th Dragoons and served in Spain under Wellington during the Peninsular War. He remained behind with the wounded during the great Retreat, and though he was a man of very slight physique, he won the respect of the French officers and soldiers by his skill and by the care he took of the wounded English soldiers in his charge. He insisted on getting them all the food and comforts possible. When he left the Army on pension, he returned to Tuam for the remainder of his life. He died there among his near relatives, the Blakes of Bridge House.

Other members of the family went to England and their descendants still reside there, but as far as I know there are only collateral descendants now residing in County Galway.

I wish to thank all those who have helped me with this paper especially Professor Thrift, the Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, and Mr. J. Hanna for permission to photograph and publish two pages from a Manuscript in the Library; Major Mac Neill and the Officers of the Ordnance Survey Department for permission to publish from the O. S. Maps the Lands and Castle of Park; Mr. Harold G. Leask who prepared the Map; Dr. Best of the National Library who deciphered the stone, Professor Eoin Mac Neill for elucidating the Egan family names, and Mr. M. MacNamara of Tuam for taking photographs for me.



PARK CASTLE AND TOWNLANDS O  
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