What kind of Irish was spoken in Westmeath?

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By the time of the Gaelic Revival at the end of the 19th century, the Irish language as a vernacular had largely disappeared across Leinster. The small extent of the language which remained was probably confined to the most remote and out-of-the-way townlands, and scattered among a generation who had been largely forgotten by the outside world – with the possible exception of a small part of Co. Louth. It is no wonder, then, that it is primarily to the north, west and southwest areas of Ireland that scholars of the language in all its varying forms have since directed their attention. It is in these regions that the language continued to be spoken into the 20th century, and indeed continues to be spoken, though much less extensively than heretofore. This focus, however understandable, has left a large gap in our understanding of the historical distribution of the dialects of Irish across the eastern half of the country. The only means of filling this gap is to carry out a detailed study of the scant remains of the language, as found in word lists, folklore collections, the later manuscript tradition (if available), everyday speech, and, last but by no means least, in placenames, including both townland and minor names. The great advantage of evidence from placenames to the historian dialectologist is the universal distribution of the placenames themselves. This means that aspects of the language which come to light in the placenames of one area can safely and easily be compared with developments in another.

No serious and detailed study of the dialect (or dialects?) of Irish formerly spoken in Co. Westmeath has been undertaken up to now. Nor does this article aspire to be such a study. Notwithstanding this, some evidence of the dialect was brought to light in the course of doctoral research by the author on the townland names of two baronies in the west of the county, Kilkenny West and Clonlonan,1 and it is worth discussing some of this evidence here.

Donn Piatt and Séamus Ó Saothraí are the only two writers to have approached this question directly to date. Piatt (1905-70), a Dubliner, was married to Eibhlín Nic Cholgán from Raharney in the east of Co. Westmeath, and it is from her that he gathered a list of Irish words

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which he published in the magazine *An tUltach* under the title ‘Iarsmaí Gaedhilge ó’n Iar-Mhidhe’ in 1935. He had this to say about the dialect itself:

BÉIM GHOTA\[\] Béim Chúige Uladh i gcomhnaidh
ach amhán ‘sa bhfoical “muchóirighe” bhfuil an bhéim ar
an dara siol.

FUAIMEANNA- Bionn “án” agus “óg” fada go maith.
“Gabhar” – fuaim Chonnachta [sic] ’s na Mumhan a bhí ag
máthair mo mhán; i gCill Dealga, Conndae na Midhe, a
tógadh i, ach chuala mo bhean “gór”. i. an tuaim [fhuaim?]
Ultach ó shean-bhean as “Cluain Ámhn” (?) ar theorainn
Chonndae Chill Dara. (Piait 1935: 7). STRESS [–
Emphasis as in Ulster always, except in the word
“muchóirighe”\[\] where the emphasis is on the second
syllable. PRONUNCIATIONS – “án” and “óg” are quite
long. My wife’s mother, who was reared in Kildalkey Co.
Meath, pronounced “gabhar” – as in Connacht and
Munster, but my wife heard “gór” i.e. the Ulster
pronunciation, from an old woman from “Cluain Ámhn” (?)
on the Kildare border.

Séamus Ó Saothraí (1927-2008), who was born in the townland of
Cloonagh near Ballynagore, also favoured Ulster Irish as being the
dialect most akin to that once spoken in Westmeath: ‘Dhealróth sé gur
foghraiocht Chúige Uladh a bhí sa taobh sin tíre. Is cosúil gur mhar a
chéile mórán Gaeilge na Mí, na hIarmhí, Lú agus Dheisceart Ard
Mhacha’ (Ó Saothraí 1969: 18). It would appear that the pronunciation
was as in Ulster in that part of the country [Westmeath]. It is apparent
that the Irish of Meath, Westmeath, Louth and South Armagh were more
or less the same. Indeed, a placename in his ow
n district shows evidence
of an Ulster influence: Baile na nGabhar/Ballynagore. He goes on to
mention three sentences of Irish which he collected from a woman in his
own townland:

‘Á, ‘Mhuir ’s trú!’, ‘Maith a brath, a ghrá!’ agus ‘Chugat
a’ taibhse dubh!’ … An bhean a fuair mé uaithe iad, tú

\[\]

2 There is townland called Clonava/Cluain Ámh in Co. Westmeath but it is in the north of
the county, near Lough Derravaragh (BLE 51930). Westmeath does not share a border with
Co. Kildare. It is possible that Cloncrave, a townland near Kinneogad in the barony of
Farbille is what is meant here. Another possibility is that it is the Meath-Kildare border that
is meant here and that ‘Cluain Ámhn’ is a minor placename from that area.

3 = *muchóirí* ‘(1) early rising; (2) early riser’ (Ó Dónaill).
As accurate as Ó Saothraí¹ was about his own area, he supplies little evidence (apart from Piatt’s material, which mostly related to the barony of Farbill) regarding other parts of the county, and he can hardly have been justified in his claim that the Irish of Westmeath belonged to the southeast Ulster dialect area. To illustrate this point it is worth looking at the townland name Culleenagower/Coillín na nGabhar in the parish of Kilmanganagh, barony of Clonlonan: ‘Made gore in Ulster but it[’]s pronounced gour here’ (OSNB).² It is pronounced ‘kul’ín’a, gaur locally at present (J. Hackett 2011). Gabhar is usually pronounced gaur in the Irish of Munster and Connaught. There is further evidence of the pronunciation of abh as au in the townland name Bunown/Bun Abhann, in the parish of Bunown, barony of Kilkenny West: ‘owen is here and all through the King[’]s Co.

¹ ‘Alas!’ (lit. Oh, Mary it’s a pity).
² ‘well seen [perceived], my love’
³ ‘Look out! the black ghost!’
⁴ = The parish of Castletownkindalen, barony of Moycashel. cf. Walsh 1957: 59n. & 89n.
⁵ = The barony of Moycashel.
⁶ According to his obituary Ó Saothraí ‘had a lifelong interest in the idiom of his native Westmeath and his book on the subject awaits publication’ The Irish Times 22-11-08.
⁷ Comments like this in the OSNB are usually by John O’Donovan.
pronounced **ouns** the **ou** like the **ou** in the English word **ounce**' (OSNB). ‘bun, aun’ is the present local pronunciation.

It is right, in the light of John O’Donovan’s comments, to discuss Nicholas Williams’s work on the Irish of Co. Offaly at this juncture (Williams 1998). The Irish of Co. Offaly seems to have had a close affinity with that of eastern Connacht (excepting two baronies in Éile in the south of the county – a district which historically belonged to Munster); though there is also evidence of east Ulster features in the dialect (Williams 1998):

Offaly Irish resembles east Galway in its retention of the historic short vowel before long sonants: cam, poll, dál etc. In the treatment of the final unstressed syllables in -\( (e)amh, -(a)igh, -(e)adh, \) etc. the Irish of Offaly agrees largely with east Galway ... Among other features reminiscent of Connaught one can mention nasalisation after san ‘in the’, toidheacht as verbal noun of tigim ‘come’, the futures in -\( (e)ó-\) and the word crúóg.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the Irish of Offaly is the large number of apparently Oriel and Ulster features to be found in it. Among such one can cite -\( -ach > -a, \) lowering of long ó to á … (Williams 1998: 571).

Williams contends that a single general dialect was once spoken throughout Connacht and Leinster, with distinct subsidiary dialects spread within that broad tract. He calls this general dialect **Galeonic Irish**, though this term is probably best avoided.\(^\text{11}\) Suffice it to say that the dialects spoken in Connacht had a lot in common with those in Leinster (excluding Louth, Meath and Ossory (Kilkenny and parts of Co. Laois). Within the dialect formerly spoken in Leinster Williams distinguishes counties Kildare, Dublin, Wicklow and Carlow, where some traits of Munster Irish are evident, from an area comprised of south Longford, Westmeath, and most of Co. Offaly. It seems the Irish spoken in this latter area was most akin to that of eastern Connacht (Williams 1994 & 1998).

\(^{11}\) Named after the Gáileoin (another name of the Laighin), an early population group who occupied the area of what is now called Connacht and Leinster. Williams admits this much: ‘Is ceart a léiriú anseo, áfach, nach ionann an t-ainm sin a thabhairt ar an gcéannaí agus a rá gurb iad na Gáileoin/Laighin ab údar léi’ (Williams 1994: 471). *It is right to make clear here, however, that to apply that name [Galeonic Irish] to the dialect is not to say that the Gáileoin/Laighin were its originators.*
There is some evidence to support Williams among the local and historical forms of the 276 townland names in the baronies of Kilkenny West and Clonlonan examined by the author. Minor placenames, gathered during fieldwork in those two baronies, also merit consideration.

According to Williams (1998) \(\text{ao} \) was usually pronounced \(i:\) in Westmeath, Offaly and Laois, as it would have been across the province of Connacht. Éamonn Mhac an Fhailigh [= E.V. Nally] recorded \(\text{ao} \) as \(i:\) in the words \(\text{caorán} \) and \(\text{caorthann} \) in \(\text{Emper} \), barony of Moygoish (Mhac an Fhailigh 1948: 258). \(\text{Caorthann} \) also occurs in the townland name \(\text{Ballykeeran}/\text{Bealach Caorthainn} \) in Kilkenny West parish, where \(\text{ao} \) is also realised as \(i:\). Further examples of \(\text{ao} > i:\) include \(\text{Cartronkeel}/\text{An Cartún Caol} \), (Kilkenny West parish) and \(\text{Cartronkeel}/\text{An Cartún Caol} \) (Kilcleagh parish). Interestingly, there is some evidence that \(\text{ao} \) was pronounced as in southeast Ulster (\(y:\)) in the east of the county:

Tá “múilleach” i mBéarla na hIar-Mhidhe ar chlábar, cé gur maith is é a scríobh an \(\text{tAthair Ó Duinnín} \). Sin an tuaim atá ‘sa cheanntar thart ar Chill Lúcainne i \([\text{sic}]\), ach is cosamhail ó litreacha na Suirbhéarachta \(\text{Ordánais} \) (1836) gur tuaim “\(ai\)” a bhi an taobh thall de’n Mhuileann Chearr (Piatt 1936: 7). “múilleach”, meaning mud, is found in the English of Westmeath, though Dinneen writes this word maithleach [Dinneen also spells the word maithlach]. This is the pronunciation in the Killucan area, though it is apparent from the Ordnance Survey Letters (1836) that the pronunciation “\(ai\)” [= \(i:\)] was found on the far side [west] of Mullingar.

There is evidence of the change \(\text{gn-} > \text{gr} \) in the townland name \(\text{Creevenamanagh}/\text{Gníomh na Manach} \), in the parish of Kilkenny West. See the historical forms: ?\(\text{Gryeve na managh} \) (IDPP 22 n. 2 1551); \(\text{Creenamanach} \) (TAB 1823); \(\text{Crievenamonagh} \) (OSNB: BS 1837); \(\text{cri na manach} \) (OSNB: pl. 1837), in particular. There is also some evidence of the change \(\text{cn-} > \text{cr-} \) in minor placenames: \(\text{Crocan Ruad, Crockan} \) in the townland of Muckinagh on the shores of Lough Ree (BNS Ballynacliffy NS 144), though the same source gives another placename from the same area as \(\text{Cgoc Faire} \) (BNS Ballynacliffy NS 147). I myself have heard

\[12\text{ See Wagner 1958: I, 26} (\text{caor} > \text{ky}ra \text{in Omeath}).\]
‘kruk > cnoc (J. Hackett) in Ballynakill, a townland which lies directly on the border with Co. Offaly in the parish of Kilcleagh, and ‘kruk, an > cnocán (A. Walsh) in Doonis, a townland in Noughaval parish, close to the border with Co. Longford.

The development -ch > f is to be found in the word cluiche > klif’ all over Connacht (Ó hUiginn 1994: 557). This development is also to be seen in the genitive form of the word cloch as it occurs in the townland name Ballynacliffy/Baile na Cloiche, in Kilkenny West parish, first attested in the form Ballinecloffy (Piers 81-83, 91 1682). cf. Aghnachliff/Achadh na Cloiche in Co. Longford. There is a chance, however, that this development occurred after the name had been anglicised (Pádraig Ó Cearbhaill 2011: pers. comm.), presumably by analogy with the English words rough, trough (Ballenclohy (BSD 15b 1670c) > Ballincloffy (Piers 81-83, 91 1682)).

Medial -bh/-mh- is usually lost in Munster Irish (Baile an tSléibhe > bal’an tle:). This development is also in evidence in eastern Leinster: ‘Baile an tSléibhe in County Dublin for example appears in English as Ballinclea’ (Williams 1998: 561). Intervocalic -mh- is pronounced as a v in Cluain lomhair/Clonever, in the barony of Garrycastle in Co. Offaly: ‘Cluain Eibhir [sic]: “bh” pronounced.’ (Piatt 1933a: 28). This feature is also in evidence in the following forms of the obsolete placename *Cloch Eibhir (which was near, or in, the townland of Walderstown in the parish of Drumraney): cartron’ cloghvirr (Inq. Jac. 1 (5) 1611); Cloghevir; (ASE 184 1669); Cloghevir (BSD 11b 1670c).

Velar -bh/-mh- is usually pronounced as w at the start of a word in Connaught Irish, though v can be heard on the Aran Islands and

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13 ‘forás é seo ar an ngrúpa -thch- (i.e. SG cluithche). Tá a leithéid chéanna d’fhóras le sonrú san fhocal liachair (< léithghair) /Lu:far?’ (Ó hUiginn 1994: 557). This is a development of the group -thch- (i.e. Old Irish cluithche). A similar development can be observed in the word lúchair (< léithghair) /Lu:far?. The earliest form of Ballynakliffy/Baile na Cloiche is spelt Baile na Cloith MIA 1401.


15 Another possibility here is *Cloch lomhair (lomhar = personal name).
Initial -bh/-mh is pronounced w in a number of placenames from the barony of Garrycastle in Co. Offaly: ‘Cruca Wakea < Cnoc an Bhacaigh, Poll an Mhada and Gortavilla < Gort an Bhaile all with mh as w’ (Williams 1998: 561). However -bh/-mh is found as v in Ceil Bhoc > Coolvuck and Achadh an Mhóinín > Aghanvoneen in Ballyloughloe parish; Achadh an Mhóinín > Aghavoneen in Kilcloagh parish and Cloch Bhrúin > Cloghvireny (Inq. Jac. I, 5 1611) (= Cloghbreen) in Drumraney parish. Medial -mh- is lost in Ballynalone/Baile na Leamhán in Noughaval parish.17 Cf. Baile an Leamhain/Ballylevin in eastern Co. Offaly (BLÉ 41964).

Gníomh is pronounced gr‘iːw in Cois Fharraige (De Bhaldrataire 1975: 46). It appears from some of the historical forms of Creevenamanagh/Gníomh na Manach, in Kilkenny West parish; Gnywenemanagh alias Gnywternemanagh (Fiants Eliz. 1355 1569); Gnewnamanagh (DS 1655); Gnewnamanagh (BSD 14b 1670c); Gnownikamanagh (ASE 230 1673), that final -mh was pronounced w in the word gníomh. See also Leighgnewnewlogh (Inq. Car. I (3) 1625) > Leathghníomh an Locha? (a placename associated with the same area in the 17th century), and Gniwkill (DS 1655), which was in Ballyloughloe parish.

I have found one example of final -mh following a short unstressed vowel in the name of a small area in Rath Upper in Noughaval parish; ’Sa nt, Í (K. Maher 2008) > Seantalamh; and Seantallo Inq. Car. I, 85 1633); o almost certainly represents ō (schwa) in the second form (Donal Mac Giolla Espaig 2011: pers. comm.). Based on manuscript evidence Williams (1994: 472) reckons -amh was pronounced -a in Westmeath; it should be noted, however, that his source manuscript originated in Delvin, in the northeast of the county.

The word lonnradh is pronounced lundhr in Cois Fharraige (De Bhaldrataire 1975: 38-39), while cónra is similarly pronounced cóːndhr by some speakers of Connemara Irish (Nollaig Ó Muraíle 2011: pers. comm.). Some forms of the townland name Ardnaponra/Ard na Pónra, in Kilmanaghan parish show a similar development: Arnapond (DS 1655); Ardaghpond (Reg.D. 6-445-2549 1711); Ardnapondra (TAB

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16 See also Cinn Mhara/Kinvara in Co. Galway: ’ránːə spell ‘ranːə’ (Wagner 1958: I, siv).

17 This townland lies partly in Drumraney and partly in Noughaval parish.
1827) and ˈardnəˌpɔndə (J. Hackett 2011). See also ˈpuːləˌpɔndə (< Poll na Póna?) (D. Claffey 2011) the name of a small area in, or near, Gurteen in Kileleagh parish, about three kilometres southeast of Ardnaponna. It is possible, however, that this development occurred after the element pónra was anglicised (Pádraig Ó Cearbhall 2011: pers. comm.).

There is evidence in a number of placenames, especially in Ballyloughloe parish, that the adjective mór may have been pronounced muːr or muːr in the study area. This development is found in the dialect of Iarthar Duibhneach, Co. Kerry, and in the other Munster dialects (Dinn. 765). See Magheramore < An Machaire Mór; ˈmˠathəɾəˌmuːr (B. Muldoon 2011 & J. Casey 2009). The genitive of seanmóir is similarly pronounced in Aghanashanamore < Achadh na Seamóra; ˈʔaŋəʔ, ʃaːnəˌmuːr (J. Casey 2011); Aghneshanmore (HES 9 1786). It is possible that this development has its origin in the anglicised form of these names. Orthographic -or- is pronounced uː in words such as sword > suːrd and ford > fuːrd by conservative [English] speakers in this area. 18 However, the motte from which the village of Mount Temple takes its name was known to local Irish speakers in the 19th Century as Mota muar bal locha luatha (< Móta Mór Bhaile Locha Luatha) (OSNB: pl. 1837). Movvore/Maigh Mhórda is a townland and village in the barony of Rathconrath and lies about sixteen kilometres northeast of Mount Temple. ‘The local traditional pronunciation is maː ˈvˠuːr or mˠiː ˈvˠuːr or even mˠiː ˈvˠjuːr with some’ Éamonn Mhac an Fhailigh[,

There is evidence in some townland names and minor placenames that the adj. fionn was pronounced ˈf ants in the study area. The local Irish form of Aghafin < Achadh Fionn in Noughaval parish is

18 The Ford of Ross, a manmade ford connecting the townland of Ross (Noughaval parish) with Killeenmore (Bunown Parish) is known locally as ˈfuːrə ɾ oːs (P. Slevin 2007). Éamonn Mhac an Fhailigh also notes this pronunciation in the English of Emper, barony of Moygoish, Co. Westmeath (unpublished typescript on the English of Emper - RIA 23 O 84/13).
recorded as: *acha feann* (OSNB: pl. 1837). John O’Donovan had this to say about a small island on Lough Ree (in Bunown parish) called *Illanfan* < *Oiléan Fionn*: ‘In this neighbourhood, and in the King’s County FIONN, fair or white[,] is prond. fan’ (OSNB). The current local pronunciation is ‘lan’fan (P. Slevin 2007). *Cluain Fionnlocha/Clonfinlough* a townland and village in the barony of Garrycastle, Co. Offaly, is known locally as *klon’fanl* (BLÉ 41213 – text record 1988). In Ballynahown, which lies just across the border from *Cluain Fionnlocha/Clonfinlough* in Kilcleigh parish, Co. Westmeath ‘fionn, is pronounced ‘fan’ (Ó Háinle 2011: 262). Cf. *Achadh Fionn/Aghafin* > *ahi’fan* (BLÉ 41248 – text record 1985) in the same district. Éamonn Mhac an Fhailigh records *cúl fionn* ‘gristly outer portion of tough steak’ as *ku˘l f˘an*, and *fionn* ‘these boots would fit Fionn mac Cool’ as *f˘an* in *Emper*, barony of Moygoish, Co. Westmeath (1948: 259).

There is evidence of the development *-cht* > *-rt*, a feature characteristic of the Irish of Gaoth Dobhair, and also found in a few other areas, in two surnames in the study area: Ó Connachtáin > *Connaughton* > ‘konoralan’ (local), *Connorton* (Census 1901);20 Ó Neachtain > *Naughton/Naughten* > ‘norlan’ (local), *Norton* (Census 1901).21 Similarly, the province of Connacht is known to some conservative [English] speakers in the study area as *kon’ort < Connacht* (J. Parker). A handful of other surnames show the change *-ch* > *-rt/*: Mac Lochlainn > *McLoughlin* > *m’glorkalan* (L. Finnegan); Mac Cocláin > *Coughlan* > ‘kork,lan and ‘kort,l’an. These forms of Mac Cocláin > *Coughlan* are in common use throughout west Offaly, an area with which this surname has a long association.

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19 Carrownamannarth < *Ceathrú na mBeannach*, a local form of the townland of *Ceathrú na Mallacht* (Carrownamallagh) in east Mayo - BLÉ 36342).

20 There were one hundred people with the surname *Connaughton* in Westmeath in 1901 (out of 637 in the whole country). There were a further forty who used the spelling *Connorton*, thirty nine of whom were living in the barony of Kilkenny West, with the other individual living in the neighbouring barony of Clonlonan (Census 1901). In the country as a whole the combined figures for the spellings *Connorton* (70) *Connerton* (15) *Conerton* (10) and *Conorton* (6) give a total of 101. Outside of the study area these forms were most often recorded in counties Galway (22), Dublin (15) and Roscommon (14).

21 Households using the spellings *Naughten* and *Norton*, are found side by side in the same townland (*Ardnahargh* (Duby)) in Drumraney parish (Census 1901).
The position of stress in the Irish formerly spoken across Connacht and Leinster is one of its the most distinguishing characteristics:

... although like the Irish of Munster it shifted the accent from the root syllable to an originally unstressed long vowel, the accent did not remain on the long syllable, but was thrown back again onto the previously accented syllable. The first shift of accent had weakened the newly unstressed vowel and it remained weakened when the accent again fell upon it. Thus 'scadán' was first stressed on the first syllable. Because the second syllable was long the accent shifted giving 'sca'dán' with the stress on second syllable but with a weakening of the first now unaccented syllable to the neutral vowel schwa : schwa. Later the accent moved back to the first syllable, and the schwa became an unclear but fully stressed vowel: 'scudán'. (Williams 1998: 556).

Donn Piatt, in commenting on a list of Irish words from the Shannonbridge and Clonmacnoise areas (barony of Garrycastle) in Co. Offaly, states that there was no need to mark stress as it was ‘as in Northern Irish’ (Piatt 1933a: 28). It can be assumed that it is the Irish of the Northern half of the country that is meant here, where the emphasis is almost always on the initial syllable (Williams 1998: 557). Williams notes that the word putachán is spelt putachán on this list, and cites the presence of this weakened but fully stressed u vowel as evidence that stress had shifted from the initial syllable towards the final syllable, and subsequently back on the initial syllable in the dialect of Irish formerly spoken in this part of Offaly (as in the word scadán mentioned above).

This phenomenon is well attested throughout the province of Connacht; particularly in multisyllabic words with a long vowel in the second syllable (Ó hUiginn 1994: 545). A handful of such examples occur in minor placenames in the study area, and in one townland name.

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22 ‘List supplied by C. Mac Aonghusa, whose grandfather was one of the last four natives of the locality to know an amount of Irish natively’ (Piatt 1933a: 28). According to Tim Robinson (2011: 26) Criosdóir Mac Aonghusa (1905-91), father of the late broadcaster Proinsias Mac Aonghusa, was a native of Co. Offaly (born near Banagher, and reared outside Shannonbridge, (Ni Mhurchú & Breatnach 2003: 65)), and is most likely the person referred to by Piatt here. Elsewhere Piatt mentions ‘Hubert McGinnis (died 1923)’ of Shannonbridge as one of the last Irish speakers in Co. Offaly (Piatt 1933b: 111).
da ¹'kutʃ, 1aːn (P. Moran 2009) (< the caisleán), is the name of a small laneway in the townland of Bryanmore Upper in Drumraney parish. A small area in Killeenmore townland, in Bunoown parish, is known locally as 'kutʃ', ʃiːn’ (P. Slevin 2007) (< coillín). This pattern of stress shift has led to the re-analysis of the townland name Bleanphuttoge (in Kilkenny West parish) as follows: Bléin Phatógí (inlet of the small vessel) > Bléin Phutóige 'inlet of the intestine'(!). The initial vowel of the second element, patóg 'small vessel' weakened from a to o when stress was shifted to the final syllable. The subsequent shifting of stress back onto the initial syllable caused this vowel to be realised as u, with patóg being mistakenly understood as putóg. The key historical forms are: Plein Pattogi (CGG 108 1110c), Blen[f]tok24 (Crown Lands 124 1540-1), Bleanpotogg (CPR Jas. I 2a 1604), and blaidheain phutoig (OSNB: pl. 1837).25

A small number of words in Connacht Irish have retained final stress. In almost all such cases weakening or loss of the initial syllable is evident. This occurred when stress was shifted towards the final syllable: arán > ɾɑː:n; coláiste > 'klɑːʃt'o (Ó hUiginn 1994: 545);

It is apparent that this practice [vowel weakening] used to be found as far north as Co. Sligo (O’Rahilly, 1932, 99[=IDPP]. There is some evidence, scant though it may be, that this tendency was stronger in the east than in the west of the province. Ó Máille (1927, 109) noticed that it was usual for [Irish-] speakers from east Galway, Roscommon and Leitrim to

23 The site of a ruined castle lies adjacent to this laneway.
24 Mac Niocaill (Crown Lands 124) gives Blenstok, though the s here is most likely a scribal error (f for s).
emphasise the second syllable of words like an t-oileán26, iarann, tearmann ... (Ó hUiginn 1994: 546).

Ó Sé (1989: 157) is of the view that Co. Roscommon was the core area for stress shifting as outlined above. He also mentions the intriguing possibility that this pattern of stress shifting was a feature of the Shannon basin, linking north Tipperary with the northeast Connacht area and possibly extending into part of Co. Longford (cf. IDPP 101). Williams (1998), as we have seen above, has shown that such stress shifting was also a feature of the Irish of west Offaly.

In the case of five minor island names on Lough Ree, the first syllable of the element oiléan appears to have been lost through apheresis: Oileán Fionn > Illanfan > 'l’ân’ fian; Oileán Rua > Red Island > 'l’ân’ruːː; ?Oileán an Bháid > Illandavagh > 'l’âna’vaːː; ?Oileán an Steallaidh > l’âniðtil’ə; ?Oileán na Giúise > Lannausta27 > 'l’âna’g’uːː' (P. Slevin 2007). The development of oiléan > ‘leán > ‘l’ân in these names represents good evidence of the presence of final stress, at least in some words, in the dialect formerly spoken in the study area on the Westmeath shore of Lough Ree. This very proximity to the Shannon – since the river may be seen either as a linguistic barrier or a linguistic conduit – gives the study area a particular significance in the study of the historical distribution of Irish dialects. Some features peculiar to the study area may not have been common to the rest of Westmeath, or even the western portion of the county, but may relate to the Shannon basin itself as an area of linguistic continuity. The overall picture therefore remains unclear, though it can be said with a degree of certainty that the Irish spoken in at least the western half of Westmeath had many features in common with that which was spoken across a wider area encompassing west Offaly, southwest Longford, and eastern Connacht. On the other hand, in the eastern half of the county, and in areas adjoining Co. Meath, it seems likely that the dialect spoken

26 Ó Máille (1927) does not give oiléan as an example on p. 109 or elsewhere in his discussion of stress.

27 See Lannausta Bay in Collum (barony of Rathcline, Co. Longford N 021 561). Originally an island name. The other small islands listed above lie between the islands of Inchmore and Inchturk and Portlick Bay in Co. Westmeath. Further examples of apheresis in island names can be found in a group of three small islands just north of Inchenagh, a large island on Lough Ree in the barony of Rathcline, Co. Longford (local forms, after Cahill et al 2006: 160, in italics): Bushy Island > Lanasky [= Oileán na Sceiche], Goats Island > Lanagower [= Oileán an Ghabhair], Little Island > Lanageish [= Oileán na Géise]; final stress is also in evidence in the townland name Tullvran/Tulnah Bhioráin, also in the barony of Rathcline (BLE 33429).
had features in common with the Irish of southeast Ulster. The boundary between these two centres of influence on Westmeath Irish, east Connacht and southeast Ulster, remains unclear and only a comprehensive analysis of placenames and other evidence across Co. Westmeath and adjacent counties will further illuminate it.\textsuperscript{28}

**Abbreviated References**

OSNB  
Ordinance Survey name books, arranged by civil parish. MSS in the National Archive; also available in a typescript copy by Fr O’Flanagan.

OSNB: BS  
Boundary Survey (anglicised forms of placenames mentioned in the OSNB).

OSNB: pl.  
Local Irish form of placenames mentioned in the OSNB – usually written in pencil in the name books.

ASE  

BLÉ  
Bunachar Logainmneacha na hÉireann = The Placenames’ Database of Ireland. The Placenames Branch (a branch of the Department of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht) in cooperation with FIONTAR (Dublin City University). Accessed: [www.logainm.ie](http://www.logainm.ie). The database entry number (+ record card number) is given in references to this source

BNS  
Bailiúchán na Scoileanna = The Schools’ Collection. Material gathered as part of ‘Scéim Bhéaloideas na Scol (1937-38)’. Irish Folklore Commission. MSS in the National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin.

BSD  

CGG  

Reg.D.  
Registry of Deeds, Dublin. References are by volume, page number and deed (memorial transcription).

\textsuperscript{28} An important contribution on Westmeath Irish was published as this article was going to press: Williams, N. (2012) ‘Gaeilge na hIarmhí’, in Mac Cárthaigh, E. & Uhlich, J. (eds.) *Féitseirbhíonn do Chathal ó Háinle*. An Clochmhar, Indreabhán.


TAB  Tithe Applotment Books – MSS in the National Archive, Dublin.
Secondary Sources


Local Sources

James Casey c. 40. Forestry contractor, a native of Aghanashanamore in Ballyloughloe parish.
Declan Claffey c. 59. Butcher and building worker, a native of Baltrasna in Kilcleagh parish.
James Hackett c. 74. Farmer, born and reared in Ballynakill in Kilcleagh parish.
Patrick (Paddy) Moran, c. 65. Farmer, a native of Clophbreen in Drumraney parish.
Brian Muldoon, 27. Accountant, a native of Carn Park.
Jim Parker 74 1999†. Farmer and builder, born and reared in Glassan in Kilkenny West parish.
Patrick (Pateen) Slevin, c. 80. Fisherman and farmer, born and reared on the island of Inchturk on Lough Ree (Noughaval parish).
Ann Walsh, c. 60 Toberclare (Kilkenny West parish). Nurse, a native of Cartroncroy (Noughaval parish).
Fig. 1. The baronies and parishes of Westmeath (based on Sheehan 1978).

1) Ardnamurcher or Horseleap
2) Ballyloughloe
3) Ballymore
4) Ballymorin
5) Bunown
6) Carrick
7) Castlelost
8) Castletownkindalen
9) Churchtown
10) Clonamecy
11) Clonfad
12) Conry
13) Delvin
14) Drumraney
15) Durrow
16) Dysart
17) Enniscoffey
18) Faughalstown
19) Foyran
20) Kilbeggan
21) Kilboccy
22) Kilbride
23) Kileleagh
24) Kilcumny
25) Kilkenny
26) Kilkenny West
27) Killagh
28) Killare
29) Killua
30) Killucan
31) Killulagh
32) Kilmacnevan
33) Kilmanaghahan
34) Kilpatrick
35) Lackan
36) Leny
37) Lackbla
38) Lynn
39) Mayne
40) Moylisker
41) Mullingar
42) Multryfarnham
43) Newtown
44) Noguval
45) Pass of Kilbride
46) Piercetown
47) Portloman
48) Portnashangan
49) Rahugh
50) Rathapick
51) Rathconnell
52) Rathconrath
53) Rathgarve
54) Russagh
55) St. Feighin’s
56) St. Mary’s
57) St. Mary’s (Athlone)
58) Stonehall
59) Street
60) Taghmon
61) Templecorran
62) Templepatrick
63) Tyfarnham