

CHAPTER IV

Cinel Eoghain - The Central Lowlands – Battle of Clontarf – Boru - King of Thomond – Toomavara Parish – The Scholar of Aegus – New walled towns – Viking raids – King Murchertach – Lough Derg – River Shannon – O Connor – Killaloe – Nenagh – Friars Island.

The kingship of the Cinel Eoghain became lessened - dropped out of succession. By 976, Brian Boru [Boru] asserted control over the whole of Munster. It was during this time that Amlaib Cuaran's [AD945-80] daughter and grandson were baptised and given Irish Christian names – Mael Muire and Gilla Ciarain. Later, during the Battle of Clontarf, 1014, Brian heralded the claim to the throne of all Ireland including the land held by the Ostmen. Support however by other Irish leaders was not forthcoming. A number of clans leaders populating north Leinster and Munster, one being Maelseachlainn O' Ciardha, bribed just before the battle to desert with his men, fought with the Norsemen - to remove Brian's power in Limerick. This united gathering failed and Brian won a great victory although he never lived long enough to reap the rewards for he was killed in his tent pitched on the field of battle.

Boru's reign shattered the old order, his death allowed Máel Sechnaill II to be high king of Ireland until his demise in 1022. The Ostmen were allowed to remain and develop their towns, which gradually became main centres of importance. All those clans linked to the O'Neill's, including the O'Ciardha, lost political power – new relationships were formed – some gained advancement others declined. The O'Ciardha clan started to split up - part moved to the kingdom of Man, others to the Isles and a further group retreated to western Munster – today's Co Cork and Kerry, whilst others fled to the hills or joined other clans. The main nucleus of older members continued to maintain their old ways close to the ancestral home.

Enjoying large areas of land, or what it produced, did not burden the Irish lord or 'leader. It mattered not to him that another might quote amounts he was more concerned about 'status' according to whom he knew, who served him and who needed his power and position. This was a major failing in the Irish leadership system accepting the rank others accorded him, showing greater deference, that 'the other was the greater lord'. When he died all that deference died with him and there was turmoil, until the whole lot settled down again...more than likely, to show a different order! The king was not a judge... he was there to lead his people into war and to be a chair at the various meetings. However, it was rare that the eldest male descendant or nominated leader was not accepted... he had to be strong enough to demand obedience, having proved his worth with deeds. The pagan brehons, previously known as the Druids, were the lawyers and governed the social system. They were not the poets or filid although holding the same high office.

Kincora was a stone built fortress guarding Lough Derg and was at one time Brian Boru's capital, although Cashel still represented the ancient seat of the Munster kings. Brian first established himself as king of Munster in place of the traditional Eoganacht king of Cashel in 1002. Mael Sechnaill, king of Tara, who had been ruling since 980, acknowledged his supremacy.

Two years before, High king Murchertach presented Kincora to the Church where it became the seat for the new archbishopric of Munster. Gilla Espaic, or Gilbert, was made bishop of Limerick about 1106 and appointed papal legate. This action made an alliance between the High king and southern reformers to the traditional head of the Irish Church. The O'Brian's' moved to their new capital in Limerick ruling the Ostmen - their vassals. It was at Limerick, called by the Norse name, 'the Lax Weir', that salmon fishing was highly valued becoming a chief industry - many Viking ships rode at anchored in the Shannon lakes. Ostmen, meaning 'Eastmen', the name given to Christianized semi-Irish settlers in Ireland after 1014, were an established entity before the invasion of England by the Normans.

The waves of the sea and salmon depicted on the bottom-third of the family Coat of Arms suggests that the sea that feeds the river Shannon and Lough Derg played an important part in the life of the family - sufficient to be recorded on the O’Ciardha shield...

Murchertach divided Ireland up into twenty-four sees in 1111. This action replaced the old monastic order. Eight years later Turloch sought High kingship after Murchertach’s death. The O’Brian’s and the kingdom of Cashel never assumed great power again. Turloch had his fleet based on Loch Derg and his fortress at Dunleogha, which held Connacht and the bridges over the Shannon. Turloch had twenty-three sons all had land at the expense of others taken on as vassals or else thrown out. The aristocracy was so avarice, so numerous, that there was no other outlet for them but war. Munster was divided between three of his sons, Muirchertach, Diarmait and Tadc who died within a month. Tribe extinction by war, expulsion or ill health frequently was the case... about thirty years later, with the advent of the Cistercians some order was restored.

Turloch More O’Connor, 1119 – 1156, was High king. He was the son of Rory O’Connor, king of Connacht in 1106. Ireland contained a hundred kinglets arranged into five bigger groupings roughly into today’s provinces. The High King also ruled one of the provinces - held the power base of these other provinces. In Ireland, there were three grades of kings. At the bottom was the king of the smallest kingdom called a *tíath*, next in order an overking *ruiri* and finally king of overkings *ri ruirech*. By the middle of the twelfth century, these titles changed to one of lordship. Lower down the social scale came noblemen who were linked to the lord - normally by a feudal bond – owed an allegiance to. At the bottom of the scale came the commoners some freemen others not. Where a clan inhabited a border between counties or shared land with the diocese, which is the case of the O’Ciardha - Killaloe, the likelihood of that clan remaining strong, is slight. Wars and disputes undermined ancient rights especially when the warrior chiefs were away fighting... weaknesses were soon exposed.

Bridge links Killaloe with Ballina, into north Co Tipperary... along the Nenagh road stands the round tower of Derry Castle in Loch Derg, depending on the tide. In the Loch, Friars Island - which contains the ancient church of St Lua, the first bishop of the See of Killaloe?

THE

MACLOCHLAINN KINGS OF CINEL EOGHAIN

Murchertach [High King]

1156 – 66

Connor	Niall	Melachlin	Murchertach
1166 – 70	1170 – 76	1176 - 85	1188 – 96

Connor Beg
1201

Donal
1230 – 81

Already we have seen that the O'Ciardha clan chiefs were 'vassals' under the protection of another – in this case it was the O'Neill's. They in turn had vassals... and so on. If one or another lost power there was an readjustment... if one clan was split-up through interclan wars they lost status – in some cases the clan became extinct – their land and rights forfeited. For clans to survive their chiefs had to demonstrate their strength, usually in battle... it was necessary to have allegiances to ensure security. The O'Ciardha was part of the Eoghanacht as were the O'Sullivans, O'Donoghue, O'Mahony and possibly the O'Carthys... as well as others. It is impossible to say which were the more senior or who favoured most.

The Irish clan system worked through the rent of land – the chief owed his position to an overlord to whom he paid either cash, cattle, service or all three for the land. He was expected to supply men to fight the lord's battles and to give support and succour – safe haven, in times of defeat... all to contribute towards 'payback'. Every family in the clan did similarly only towards the clan chief. In its simplest form it worked well but when more complicated broke down, especially when there was nothing to repay or barter for the sum owing.

This hieratical grouping of families with a corporate entity gave a political and legal involvement recognised by those around them. A single person or group could represent the clan as long as they had political influence or property. Over a period, the clan rulers multiplied by birth and marriage, by so doing displaced those lower down the social scale. Even though you were of the leaders family this did not guarantee your position.

The clan system revolved around 'a common people' based within an identifiable area of land, say, a valley. It was accepted that a particular man's claim to noble rank and apparel was derived over many centuries. When the dynastic clanna covered the population of this area and its founder accepted as their common ancestor – the chief was born. To marry outside the valley – the community was a rarity. The clan law in Ireland is a customary law, which is slightly different in Scotland and Wales.

The obviously more powerful Normans, whom Sechnaill showed devotion to, particularly towards Henry I, dominated the ruling bodies in Ireland. It was in 1163 that Giolla Ciaran O'Draighnan died at the Abbey of Fore a year before Abbot Moel Coenighin O'Gorman. Six years before Strongbow married Aoife after the subjugation of the native Irish by the Normans in 1169.

Domnall Mac Lochlainn, king of the Uí Néill, had total power of southern Ireland until he fell from office. [Ui Neills' of Meath and Ailech ruled for over 500 years] Domnall lost his power after appealing to Henry II for help. The English invasion sanctioned and authorized by Pope Adrian 1155 was lead by Henry's Cambro-Norman barons under the call to invade and help Domnall reclaim his land. Between 1169 and 1171 the Cambro-Normans, under the earl of Pembroke, Richard FitzGilbert de Clare, the earl of Strigoil, 'Strongbow', not only seized all of Leinster and Dublin but also invaded neighbouring provinces too defeating Rory O'Connor, high king of Ireland. This sizing of land was made under the guise that it was owed - a payback for help received. Henry II demanded and received fealty and tribute from all the surrounding kings. There followed a further diminution of the clans, O'Ciardha again elected not to show fealty although a liegeman of Ui Neill.

From about 1170 onwards, the English began to colonize Ireland. This was to the ultimate detriment of the old order of Gaelic kings; they were never to rule their own provinces again. It was from this point that clan O'Ciardha began to diminish once more – their lands and titles stolen - being distributed to English sympathisers. In 1171 O'Connor and O'Carroll with others were defeated in battle by Strongbow established the Normans as supreme. In 1175 Kerry, Limerick, Clare and Tipperary, the kingdom of Limerick [land of the O'Brian's], was signed away by Henry II and given to Philip de Braose. Munster became more French than any other place outside France.

In 1183-5 Gerald of Wales, described Ireland as being a land of bogs, wood and lakes in his commentary *Topographia Hiberniae*. This was about the only factual thing he wrote about the Irish

and was true for most of the north and central plain, at least for the next five hundred years – until land clearing and cultivation took place. What Gerald did predict correctly was that ‘Ireland would not be conquered’, he noticed, that the native’s fighting skills improved with time - put up a greater organised resistance as new fighting skills were learned and old strongholds strengthened. This could certainly be attributed to the old order.

In 1189 Conor O’Connor, son of Rory - the last native king of Ireland, was turned out of Connacht and slain. His son Cathal Carrach, motto The Red Hand of Ireland, claimed the kingship, as did Rory’s brother Cathal Crovderg. De Courcy eventually recognised him as king of Connacht. When Ruaidri Ua Conchobair died in 1198, buried in Clonmacnoise, Gaelic Irish power ended. Limerick was fortified by the building of King John’s Castle set on the shores of the Shannon, to quell O’Brian’s kingdom of Thomond.

In 1202 Crovderg, brother of Ard Ri, ‘of the Red Hand’ [O’Ciardha clan motto the same], inaugurated king by ancient ceremony at Carn Fraoich. The English considered him the greatest of all the Irish kings.

Kylkeary was then considered an unwallled urban settlement. It had many streets and numerous inhabitants - Irish as well as immigrant English. It traded in wool and hides and supported itself with vegetable products. The church and nunnery provided a visiting place for travellers passing through. It covered an area of many hundreds of acres with Nenagh, its closest Manor Town – now owned by Butler, had ‘incorporation’ conferred upon it – a privileged position. The charter granted that any tenement held for a year and a day ‘was owned’, and if by an Irishman, to be declared ‘free as an Englishman’. There was of course an acceptance that one did not openly declare and display too many old Gaelic customs.

Towns like Nenagh began to be built-up with a gated retaining wall. Forests were felled and new methods of agriculture developed. Masons and stonecutters enticed to construct the walls and houses, helped by the inhabitants who mixed the mortar and carried the stone. The citizens help was not always voluntary even though it was for their safety. Laws were passed forcing the population to assist in the work. No one was left out of the labour force all had to give a hand. If a man could not work because of illness or work, having to be done in his own business his wife had to take his place. Nenagh felt secure and the town prospered. Churches were extended and re-built; education was ordained as being necessary. English laws were followed and a degree of prosperity was felt.

The English language began to be the common means of expression. Art and science was imported together with the administration of finance and justice. Anglo-Irish dynasties gradually assumed the ruling hand - enclaves creating a frontier, which undermined the old feudal nobility. Many of these Anglo-Irish families still occupy seized lands to this day. What was a continuing feature in this subjugated and colonised land was that the colonists never thought of themselves as being natives but as Englishmen. The Irish annals describe how King John tried to ensure good relations with the natives but fell out with the northern king Aed us Neill and the Connacht king Cathal Crovderg Ua Conchobair. Both paid homage but neither trusted King John.

The Norsemen raided Limerick in 831 which they left when driven out by Brian Boru, the then king of Thomond, which became the chief seat of Donal O’Brien, King of Munster. The founder of the cathedral was Bishop O’Brien in 1217.

Between 1219 and 1232, Richard de Burgh’s nephew Hubert was temporarily in charge of England...this gave Richard considerable influence. It was his interests in Limerick and Tipperary that gave him such a good base to conquer and subdue Connacht..., which he proceeded to do. All this occurred close to the clan land of the O’Cairdha who had cast his lot in with O’Connor. The Munster chronicle reports for 1248 that ‘many of the kings’ sons of Ireland were slain that year. There was a great deal of killing and raiding, endless campaigns, fire-raising, cattle raids and pillage...the place was in turmoil.

The Lordship of Leinster, partitioned between the five daughters of William Marshal, husband of Strongbow's daughter Isabel, resulted in Kilkenny being given its liberty from the crown. This was at the end of the thirteenth century. Another change just prior to this was the rise of William, baron of Naas – a tenant of the lords of Leinster. The lordship of Ireland granted to Edward 1 in 1254 and continued by his son who died in 1327. John Fitz Thomas of Offaly, earl of Kildare passed on the earldom to his son Thomas. In 1258, the sons of the king of Thomond, and associated nobility including the O'Ciardha met and conferred supreme authority to Brian O'Neill... unfortunately; he was killed at the abortive Battle of Downpatrick in 1260.

One of Strongbow's knights Hugh de Lacy, one of the largest landholders in Hertfordshire were granted the province of Meath, part of Longford and Offaly for the service of fifty knights. He in turn dolled out lordships – entire baronies and sub-divisions of manors, to his followers - who proceeded to erect fortified enclosures to protect new immigrants. Not all this went down well with the inhabitants! In Limerick and Tipperary, a sheriff was installed to collect revenues and impart his judicial and military powers. This pressure further pushed the O'Ciardha clan into the hills and inaccessible places. The result of the sub-division of land and the installation of overseers created an outpost for the barons to protect Leinster and Dublin from incursion and provided a jumping off place to subdue outer regions of southern and western Ireland.

In 1297, Tipperary County was required to send an elected representative to attend the Dublin parliament – towns within the county two years later and of both by 1300. This act had the effect of displacing the old order - the Gaelic Irish - the Gaelic nobility. The Normans took over all and imposed themselves marrying into the Irish leadership, developing the towns and cities for their own.

Enormous progress was made to integrate all the population in the new community. Forests were cleared to form cultivated land, new methods of agriculture introduced to produce more food. Trades and commercial enterprises contained within the newly built walled towns - like Nenagh. It was a period of prosperity, which allowed monastic houses to flourish. This progress later reversed...

Carbury [Cairbre] in Kildare is a place with pre-Christian remains close to a ruined Church of Temple Doath, built on Carrick Hill, next to Carrick Castle... a castellated manor house built in the 1300. Five years later De Bermingham slew O'Connor, Prince of Offaly, and about thirty of his relatives... he then went on to appropriated all their lands. The River Boyne rises off this hill to the south, which offers a good view over the great central plain. Within sight - the ruins of a least four castles, all built by the De Berminghams.

A few years later a Gaelic reconquest swept away many of the Anglo-Irish ruling bodies - their manorial systems and associated village settlements. The old forms of address, writing and reference returned to and life reverted - to before English rule. This was the pattern where the old order tried to reassert itself. It was crushed... these times were the start of the gallowglasses who were the 'bondsmen' - mercenaries of the future. They came originally from north-west Scotland - afterwards used by the Irish - acknowledging their usefulness. Their recruitment, of any number, could be from a single clan, or a number of clans - especially disposed clan leaders without land, home or roots. The lord had to be able to keep them and their families, provide food and a dwelling. This was a very expensive undertaking so few were taken on. Using huge axes like the Normans and protected by chain mail they acted very much like samurai who, experienced in war, gave protection and allegiance unto death. They joined forces with O'Connor who sought help from King Haakon of Norway to oust the Normans from Ireland and become King. The plea came to nothing for King Haakon died before a landing made. Another attempt made by inviting Edward Bruce of Scotland in 1316 but this too failed after causing mayhem for three years – after being killed at the battle of Faughart.

The great plague struck the country in the winter of 1348 – it was the Black Death - which had already laid waste the population of Europe. Friar Clyn describes the result as depopulating Kilkenny to the extent that ‘there is hardly a house where there is only one dead’ – it believed the end of the world had arrived! Whether this was believed or not, nothing was the same afterwards. Any disputed land or a family death, which made inheritance impossible... the land, went back into the holdings of the lord of the manor.

In 1354, Ormond granted land to O’Meara near Toomevara. Four years later another parcel of land granted to the O’Kennedys’ only this time the land was in the manor of Nenagh. All together, it appears these two were granted all of Lower, and part of, Upper Ormond. The O’Carroll’s, Murrough of Uriel, chiefs of Ely, other prominent families connected to the O’Ciardha clan. These two clan families, the O’Carrolls and O’Kennedys, occupied land, which bordered and overlapped on ancient O’Ciardha territory. In legal parlance when a clan is without land, their legal claim to clanship revoked.

The ‘Statutes of Kilkenny’ passed by the Irish Parliament in 1366, prohibited colonists from intermarrying with the native Irish or learning their language. This change unsettled the population and created in its wake absentee property owners who did not want to return to ‘a land of unrest’. By 1364, there were considerable financial problems caused by these absconders. Thirty years later King Richard II created the first of a succession of Irish kings of arms. He wanted to control all those areas that the native Irish had reasserted their office in - their way of life. Heralds were needed to marshal the arms of the various knights, give military advice and regularise the battles. This was the start of a continual battle. The Gaelic Irish, Anglo Irish and Normans began to unite to form a united front against England. The Irish question began to reassert itself...

In the towns and villages of Ormond, which included Kilkeary, the Anglo-Normans had to negotiate and deal with local cultivators or freemen and the serfs called betaghs. This was similar to the English manorial system only not so efficient for the people too, were bought and sold with the land. Everything, their labour, animals and produce taxed. Eventually, they tried to oust them to take over their property for they did not understand them nor want to integrate with them. They had tried to emancipate them but they would not pay the fee. However, they still wanted their labour, which they needed. This created a lot of bad feeling and resentment.

Niall Mor O’Neill, king of Tir Eoghain, was optimistic that, he would be made the English crown’s representative over all Ireland – to bring about stability. It was not to be. After a considerable number of expeditions, battles and disputes Niall Garbh O’Donnell died in 1439.

By 1430, the original Irish lords only occupied the less fertile parts of the country. Those that did were no match for the Anglo-Irish who operated intensive farming methods. They were doomed if they continued to try to maintain the old ways of living. They were not slow in adopting a more conciliatory tone so they gradually assumed alliances both by marriage and sharing common goals. They began to drop the right to govern like royalty. The White Earl of Ormond related to both Mac Murchada of Leinster and Ua Neill of Ulster; held Tipperary and the majority of Kilkenny. Ireland was a land divided between the Anglo-English lords, as Butler earls of Ormond, and the Gaelic highly divided world of ancient custom, language and local chief. The affect this had on the English crown was great for it occupied the attention of Richard II to the extent that Henry of Lancaster landed in England and sized the throne. Richard’s sally into Ireland in 1399 failed to unite the land under one king. There was not another landing in Ireland by an English king during the Middle Ages – the ‘War of the Roses’ took all the energy and finances making England weak. [In the mid 1400s, the County of Meath, central Ireland, split into two, English and Irish].

‘The Pale’ was a fortified earthen rampart built in the fifteenth century to enclose the royal administration lands of Louth, half Meath and Kildare including Dublin – became known as the Pale [from palatinate – territory of feudal or sovereign lord]. Thomas Fitz Maurice [1456–78] was one of

three surviving Anglo-Irish magnates. Previously, the earl of Kildare had been the most powerful. However, the earls continued to assert their right to maintain their own land even when faced by intervention by Edward IV and Henry VII. The Gaelic Irish chiefs began to assert themselves for they were now versed in better ways for making war – they had benefited from previous struggles. This was not the time to build but to claim back lost land.

This inattention - ruination by neglect, was to happen to castles, churches and monasteries. Local people able to carry the heavy loads away stripped them of their lead, stone and wood. The demolition and destruction mainly affected estates and properties of vacant absentee owners.

In 1534, Thomas, Lord Offaly, the son of the ninth earl of Kildare and leader of the Anglo-Irish, declared, 'to be the king's enemy.' He was after the governorship of Ireland. That stirred-up the pot of rebellion... again put down in no short measure by Skiffington - Henry VIII's representative.

The Irish lords and military leaders still relied upon the 'long, two-handed sword' as their chief weapon of war – for close fighting. To discourage enemy horses ten-foot spears were anchored into the ground [the lancers resorted to short swords for infighting] whilst arrows kept their riders at bay. Chain mail, helmets and heavy coats protected their bodies although still wearing sandals without stockings.

How different this was to the mass of peasants who made up the army. Many were barefooted; none wore a headdress, Axes, swords and clubs plain and unfinished. Their strength came from knowledge of the country, which they could exist on, and the hardships they could bear.

It is important to understand that it was not always the case that an elder son or any son at all, inherited the chief's position. Naturally the chief, before he died, tried to ensure his son did take over his position and to that end he trained his son in such a way that this would happen. However, as I say that was not always the case? Quite often, when a chief died the elders who they wanted to lead them asked the clan, this was done by a show of hands. Normally it went to the strongest - the champion, one who could not be challenged. On the other hand, the old chief's lands were dolled out according to the antiquity of the person – to the clan elders, not necessarily to his family and his sons.