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Recording Unofficial Placenames in my Local Area

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CLÁR TAIGHDE THUAISCIRT THEAS
NORTH SOUTH RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Recording Unofficial Placenames in my Local Area

An overlooked area of placename research is unofficial, minor, local names. These can be alternative names for official names, historical sites, laneways, crossroads, the names of individual fields, or landscape features etc. Unfortunately, knowledge of these names is quickly being forgotten. You would do a great service to your area if you were able to record some of them before they are lost forever. Sometimes accompanying these names is a rich an ancient 'placename-lore', or *dinnsheanchas*, detailing aetiological accounts of how the names came into being: whether as the haunts of ghosts and other supernatural beings, like the Bean Sí (Banshee) or Cailleach Bhéarra (Old Hag of Beare); or as areas once frequented by Irish heroes, like Cú Chulainn, Fionn, Diarmuid and Gráinne. Some other places are linked with tales of local disputes, murder, treachery, love and tragedy. You never know what names and stories you might encounter.

In this unit of work, you will be asked to **collect local placenames not previously identified by the Placename Branch** (logainm.ie | Placenames Database of Ireland) or the **Northern Ireland Placename Project** (PlacenamesNI (arcgis.com)) from:

- Elderly members of your community.
- People who work with the landscape and / or have a deep knowledge of the local area—such as farmers or fishermen.

You may then write a report or devise a presentation on these unofficial placenames and their associated stories. The 'Local Placename Record Form' below will aid you in logging the relevant information.

Once the placenames are recorded, you may then log your discoveries with the Placename Branch, via their 'Meitheal Project' (Meitheal Logainm.ie). A guide is provided below for how to do this.

Local Placename Record Form

Date:

Placename in Irish

_____

Placename in English

_____

Meaning

_____

_____

Informant details

Name: _____

Age: _____

Is the placename located on the informant's land?

Yes ☐ **No** ☐

Additional notes

_____

_____

_____

Location

How the area got its name

Guide to filling out the Local Placename Record Form

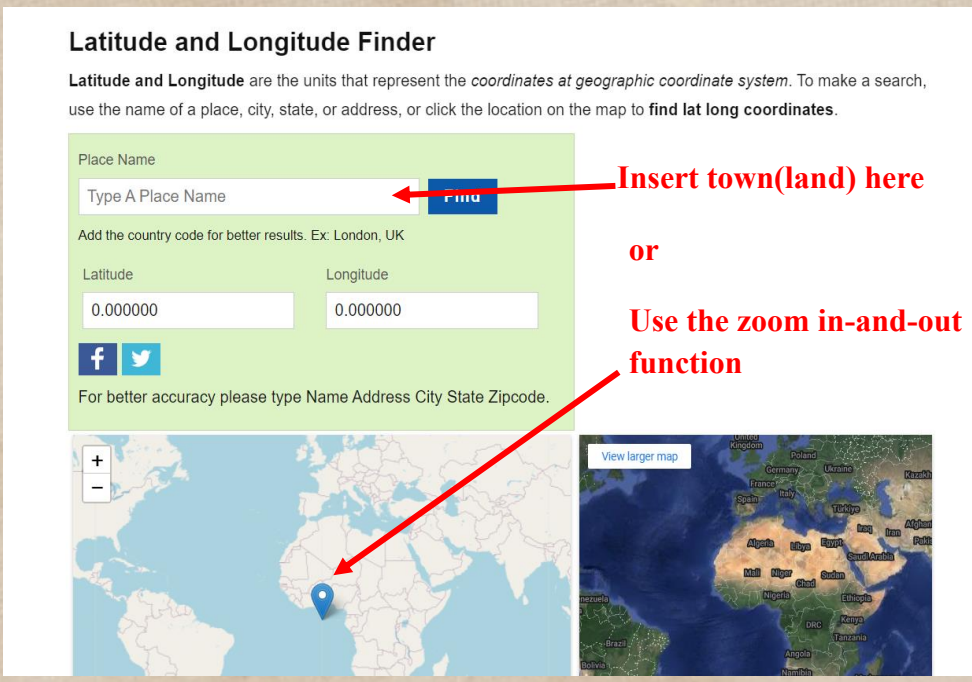
Addressing the meaning of a placename

When addressing the meaning of a name, if the Irish name is known, then Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla available on teanglann (Foclóir Gaeilge–Béarla (Ó Dónaill) (teanglann.ie)) will be of particular use. The glossary of the most common placename elements provided by the Placename Branch is also helpful especially when searching alphabetically (Glossary | logainm.ie).

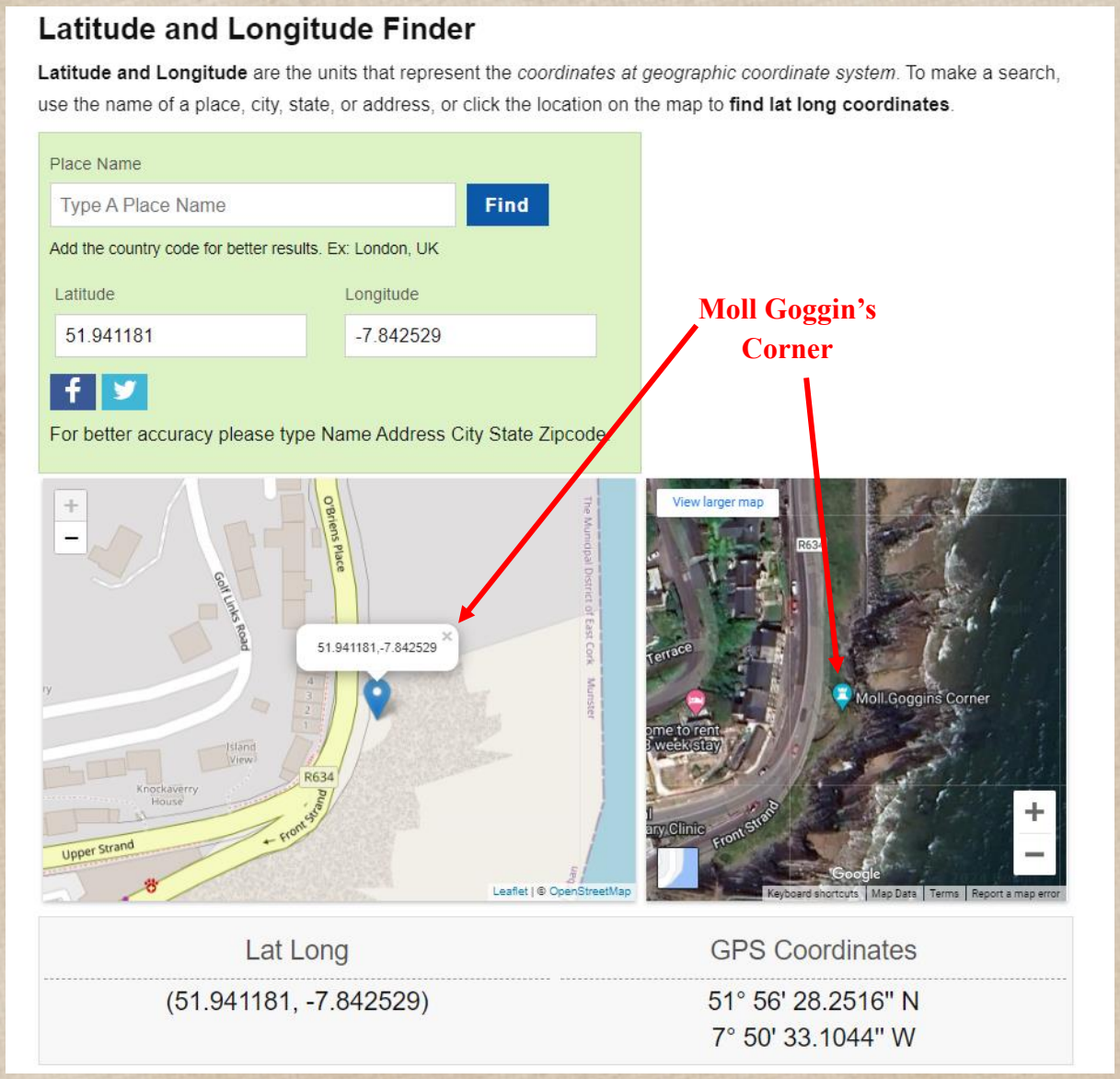
Mapping the location of a placename

When mapping the placename, it is important to be as precise as possible by using latitude and longitude coordinates, or GPS coordinates. The website www.latlong.net is especially useful for this as it gives both coordinate types and it is linked to Google Earth so you can compare the map against the aerial photographs side by side. We'll use the minor placename in Youghal known as Moll Goggin's Corner as an example, which is situated overlooking the sea, north of Youghal Strand. This name doesn't have an Irish equivalent, so we can leave that section blank. To find the coordinates go to www.latlong.net:

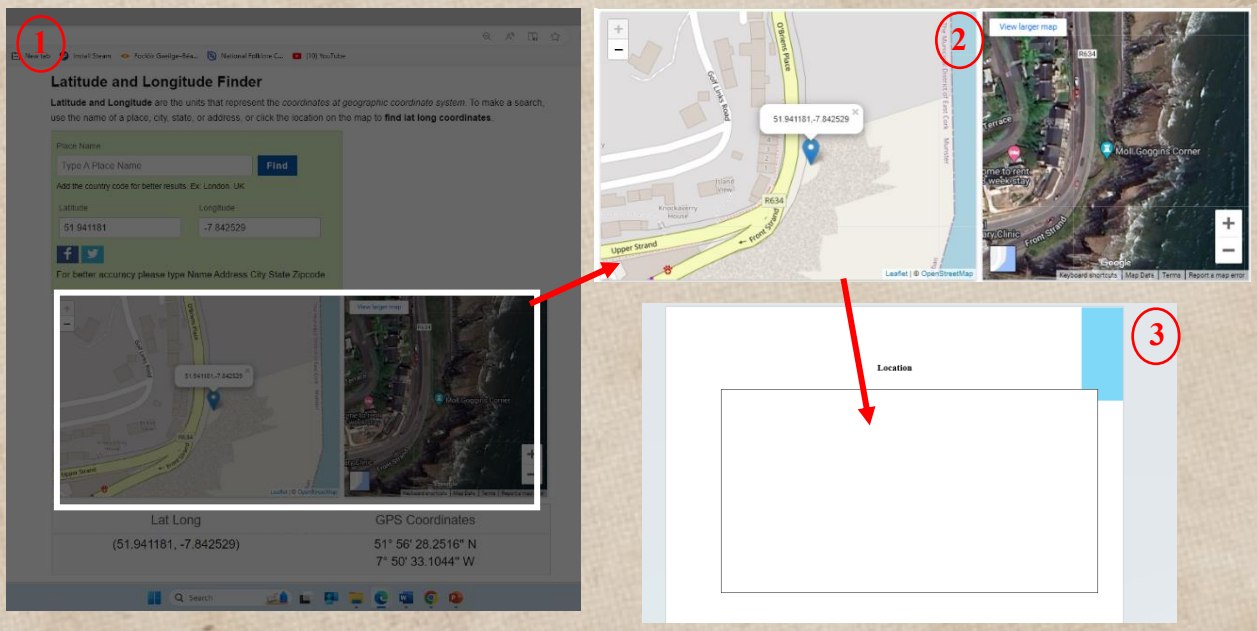
1. Enter the townland or town in which the minor placename is situated or use the map function to zoom into the area in question.



2. Narrow down your search by identifying visible features on the landscape, e.g. buildings, rivers, the coastline. The coordinates are shown below the map and aerial photograph. Here the coordinates for Moll Goggin's Corner are latitude / longitude: 51.941181, -7.842529; GPS 51°56'28.2516"N 7°50'33.1044"W.



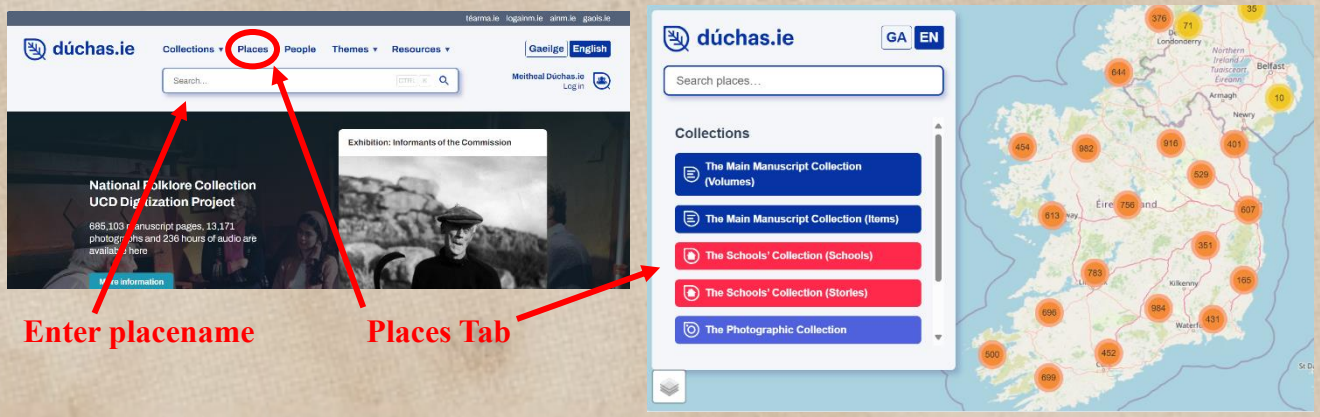
3. Snip the map and aerial photograph using the computer's snip function by simultaneously holding ⊞ (window key) + ⬆ key + 'S'. The screen will go dark, highlight the map and photograph using the mouse, and copy and paste into the location box on the form. Don't forget to record the coordinates.



Addressing how the area got its name

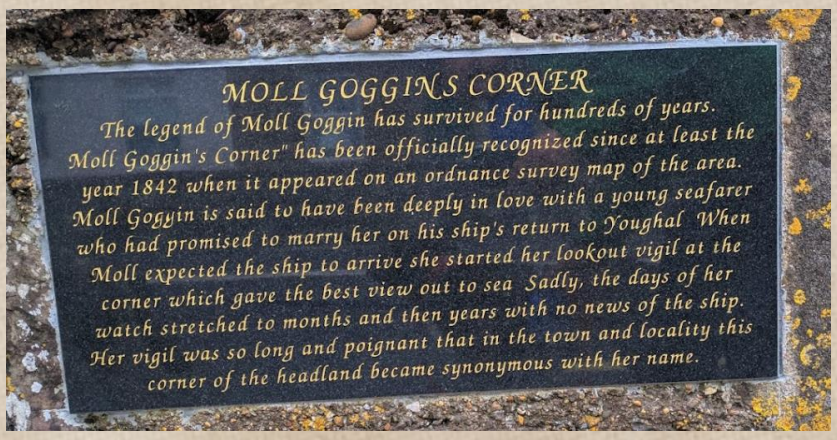
When recording how the area got its name, discuss this question with the informant—grandparent, elderly person, farmer, fisherman. If they are unsure, ask them if they know anyone in the district that might know. Record the story or the explanation in the 'How the area got its name' section of the form. Dig as deep as you can for information. Say for instance, of a field is named after a particular person, inquire if there was anything about the person that contributed to their name being given to the field.

It can also be fruitful to investigate if there is any information about the placename in question, or other local names in your area, in the 'Schools' Collection' records, which comprises local lore collected in the 1930s by schools, and which is digitally made available on the *Dúchas* website: https://www.duchas.ie/en. Try typing in the placename in the search box, or search what your area has to offer via the 'places' tab, and zoom into your location.



Even if there is no information about the placename in question in the Schools' Collection, it is still worth investigating what information is available; the collection truly is a treasure trove of local history. Unfortunately, not all regions are covered in the same depth. The collecting was left up to the individual effort of teachers and students who agreed to take part.

Sometimes there are competing traditions as to the origin of a placename. For instance, there's two traditions in the case of Moll Goggin's Corner above. One, which is the most common interpretation today as found on the plaque below, has it that a woman, named Moll Goggin, stood at the corner looking out over the horizon waiting for her lover—a sailor—to return home; alas, he never did. The other interpretation, as recorded in the Schools' Collection from the 1930s (Clochar na Toirbhirte, Eóchaill · The Schools' Collection | dúchas.ie (duchas.ie)), relays a very different account: a witch of the same name lived near the corner; one day she was cooking eggs in a frying pan and three of the eggs fell from the pan, where she said, "one man gone", after each one. This curse resulted in three men drowning that day. Moll Goggin was subsequently banished in a ball of cotton wool and her house was blown into the sea by a storm. Such investigation leads to some interesting questions: like, did the informer in the Schools' Collections 'make up' the story? Or did the first account above become dominant because it was immortalised in the plaque erected at the site?



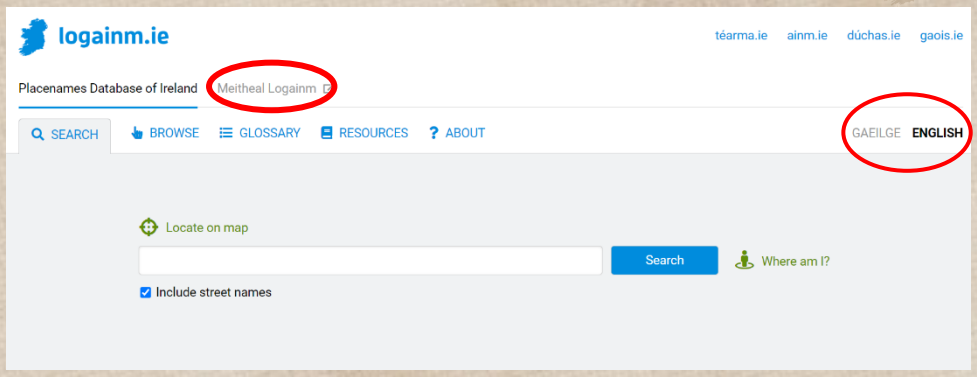
A plaque erected at the site of Moll Goggin's Corner.

Picture: © Harvey Nichols via Google Earth: Google Earth.

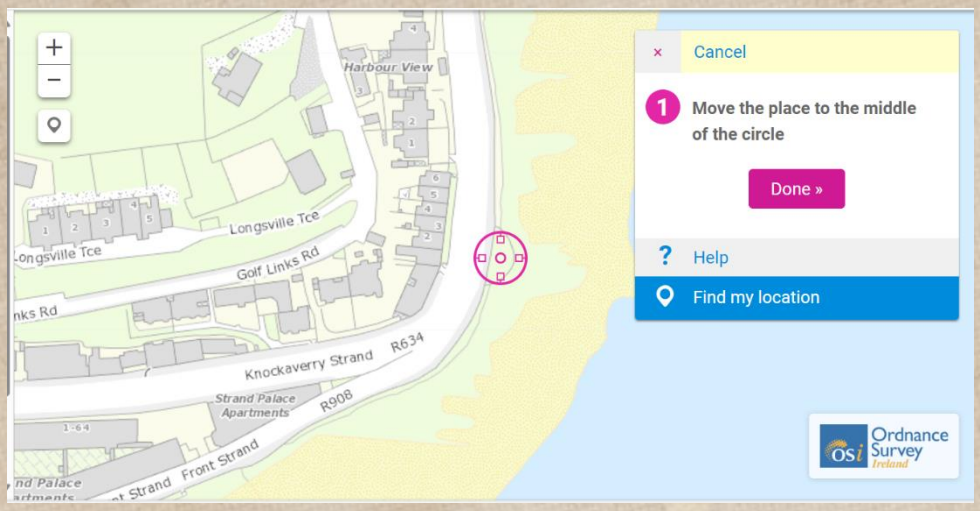
Logging the name with the Meitheal Project at Logainm.ie

Just like the efforts undertaken by those who participated in the Schools' Collection Project, you too might log the local and minor names you have collected with the Meitheal Project at www.logainm.ie:

1. choose your language preference: English or Irish.
2. Click on the ‘Meitheal’ tab.
3. Click on the ‘add a placename’ tab, on the right background of the map on screen.



4. Set up an account using your email address.
5. Zoom into the location and pinpoint the area with the name in question with the target on screen. Click on the ‘done tab’ when you are near the general location.



6. Consult the Latitude / Longitude coordinates that you gathered previously above and manoeuvre the target so that the coordinates on Meitheal match your own.
7. Input the information as requested by the Meitheal Project.

