North Munster Antiquarian Journal

IRISLEABHAR SEANDÁLUÍOCHTA TUADH-MHUMHAN

VOLUME XVIII

1976

PUBLISHED BY
THE THOMOND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

FORMERLY
THE NORTH MUNSTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Founded in 1892 as The Limerick Field Club

let were described as being inadequate in some respects, in order, it would appear, to justify the allocation and low rent charged. The following are some examples, but it is not a full list of all the properties rented to Lord Gort. Nos. 1, 2, 3, Carr's premises, Carr Street, consisted of three small plots of ground on which there were ruins of cabins. The Lime Kiln plots contained about two acres and adjoined the town wall on one side and St. Michael's burial ground on the other; Murphy's plot was in the Irishtown, fronting John's Street, with a rear on Frances Street. Gloster's Concerns adjoined Thomond Bridge; here the proposed widening of the bridge meant the removal, it was claimed, of the most valuable of these tenements; adjoining this there was an old inn and several small tenements, all in bad repair.

At the same meeting the island of Rhebogue was granted on a lease of three lives, renewable forever, at a yearly rent of one hundred and twenty pounds and a peppercorn, to Denis Fitzgerald Mahony and Daniel Gabbett. Both men had been or were then members of the Corporation.

* * * *

The activities of the Corporation did not, however, go unnoticed by the London Government. The petitions and complaints from its Limerick opponents ensured an investigation by Westminster, for on the 26th of June, 1820, it was pointed out that the Corporation's books had been taken to London by the Town Clerk, by order of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

* * * *

The Corporation proposed that an address be sent to King George IV, in order to offer congratulations on his *safe arrival* when he paid a state visit to Ireland. The address continued by expressing the *just sense of obligation we feel to your Majesty's condesention in bestowing so distinguished a mark of your Royal Favour upon this Country.*

* * * *

Ireland was given a new Lord Lieutenant in 1822; he was, in fact, a brother to the Duke of Wellington, but, unlike the Duke, he was known to favour Catholic Emancipation. He was, therefore, welcomed to the country by a great public meeting, at which an address of congratulation was proposed by Daniel O'Connell and seconded by Richard Lalor Sheil. The annual decoration by Orangemen to the statue of King William, in College Green, Dublin, was forbidden by order of the new Lord Lieutenant and the Orangemen reacted with predictable anger. On his way to the theatre a bottle was hurled at his head but it missed its target and the culprit was arrested; and on the 30th of December, 1822, the following resolution was passed by the Limerick Corporation:

> *Resolved unanimously that an address be forwarded to his Excellency Marquis Wellesley, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, expressing our horror and detestation of the vile and atrocious attack made on his Excellency at the Theatre and our Congratulations on the fortunate preservation of his Excellency.*

Placenames as Sources for Cultural Landscape Studies

PATRICK O'FLANAGAN

Geography up to the early 1950s was primarily concerned with the study of Man and his many material creations, such as, fields and farmhouses, factories and cities. To that date, little weight had been given to the presence, the potential and the real influence of Man's non-material creations, such as, ideology, attitudes, religion and tradition. In the last twenty-five years geography has experienced not only significant improvements in techniques of analysis, but also it has witnessed the emergence of a more tolerant view as to what exactly constitutes its subject matter. Atlases and maps have been forgotten, for example, in the recent efforts made to gain an understanding of how people view their own world, or as a group, their universe. An appreciation of such kinds of perception, may through vigorous and careful analysis, provide stimulating insights into the spatial ordering of the behaviour of small groups.[1] It may also furnish vital information concerning the nature of the complex and dynamic web of relationships which develops hetween a society and its surroundings.[2]

Anybody's image of his own milieu will be deeply "tainted" hy the manner in which the view is acquired and sifted. Our images of our surroundings, whether they refer to intimate doorstep situations or vague delineations of distant places, are founded upon the selective infiltration of information from disparate sources. Personal contacts, radio, television, books, maps and package tours, among others, may evoke for us representations of places. People, however, who live and work for most of their lives adjacent to their birthplace and home acquire most of their sense of place by personal experience or through personal contact. Such highly localized groups tend to develop an acutely refined sense of place, and it is regularly testified to hy the process of bestowing names on places and their utilization as a system of reference. Such placenames may refer to backyard contexts or to distant exotic locations.

To date most studies beamed upon individual or group perception have highlighted global panoramas viewed from distant vantage points by particular social groups. Scant attention has been devoted to the examination of the functions and significance of placenames designed to serve the exigencies of local groups alone. This paper represents an initial attempt to explore the potential contribution of mainly anonymous placenames in the geographical study of the changing fabric of the cultural landscape.

The value of placenames as sources in historical geography has been recognised for a long time, but they have rarely been earmarked as critical indexes in con-

[1] P. Gould and R. White, *Mental Maps*, London 1974.
[2] M. Pacione, "Through Irish Eyes: An Examination of Space Preferences", *Irish Geography*, 8 (1975), 111-121.

temporary rural social studies.[3] The valuable work expedited by the Placenames Commission with its associated journal *Dinnseanchais,* has largely been ignored by geographers, and few articles have been published in spite of the availability of the raw material. Strangely, the geographical analysis of placenames has been most vigorously pursued in North America and research has been published in all of the major geographical journals there. In addition, a journal entitled *Names* has been in press since the early fifties. France is another country where geographers have displayed a keen interest in placename research; there the main emphasis has been focused upon settlement terms.

A number of major themes of geographic placename analysis is evident. There are studies which are concerned fundamentally with the evolution of regional cultural landscapes.[4] In such studies attention is beamed upon the distribution of specialized terms, such as those referring to settlements which would indicate the general process of moulding the landscape for the service of man.

Another theme is constituted by topical studies which are riveted upon particular types of names, for example, types of enclosure or agrarian techniques and crops which would provide a picture of former limits of, and methods of, land utilization.[5]

In addition, a similar line of investigation is constituted by placing stress on the distribution of easily identifiable generic placenames so as to clarify the former extent of areas occupied by particular cultural groups, for example, Basque placenames in Spain or France, or, Arabic placenames in Iberia.[6] More specialized studies have employed placenames to gauge the relationship between colonist and colonizer in certain areas.[7] All of these approaches can be applied to large areas, such as regions, through accuracy may diminish as scale increases.

Every area in Europe which has been and still is occupied by man has been bestowed with a countless series of placenames. A number of major classes of placenames in these contexts may be isolated on the basis of their functions and interrelationships. There are, *official placenames,* that is, placenames which have been institutionalized by the State from the existing name reserve. All the placenames, for example, which appear on official maps, deeds and other documents are members of this class. In Ireland, townland names are an especially numerous group of this class. Their main function is simply to distinguish one location from another, for both external and internal interests. Most of these names are toponyms. Another class of placenames are those which identify large sectors of townlands and these names may or may not be known to the outside world. Rarely are the territories

[3] See, for example, T. Jones Hughes, "Town and Baile in Irish Placenames", *Irish Geographical Studies* (edited by R. E. Glasscock and N. Stephens), Belfast 1970.

[4] G. Whittington and J. A. Soulsby, "A Preliminary Report on and Investigation in Pit Placenames", *Scottish Geographical Magazine,* 84 (1968), 117-124.

[5] R. C. West, "The term 'Bayou' in the United States: A Study in the Geography of Placenames", *Annals Assoc. Amer. Geogrs.,* 44 (1954), 63-74.

[6] H. Lautensach, "Uber die topographischen Namen arabishen Ursprings in Spanien und in Portugal", *Die Erde,* 1954, pp. 219-248. Also W. Zelinsky, "Some Problems in the Distribution of Generic Terms in the Placenames of the North Eastern United States", *Annals Assoc. Amer. Geogrs.,* 45 (1955), 319-349.

[7] D. E. Sopher, "Arabic Place Names in Spain", *Names,* 3 (1955), 5-13.

designated by these names precisely defined on maps. Finally, there are those names which have been created and maintained to serve local needs alone, and such names are unknown to the world at large. These kinds of names may be termed *corporate placenames,* as they are only in use amongst a distinct and localised group of people.

It is this final category of placenames which offers the geographer a virtually untapped source for the study of the contemporary and former organization of the cultural landscape. They also offer the opportunity of clarifying current relationship between distinctive groups and their habitat. Such placenames, as well as the people who use them, are highly defined territorially. In Ireland the townland is the primary areal setting for such placenames. Too often in the past placenames recognised in the literature as belonging to such contexts were disregarded; their frequent categorization as *minor placenames* symbolized their relegation as sterile sources, unworthy of serious attention.

The analysis of corporate placenames may be usefully conducted by scrutinizing them in terms of their *origin, form, function,* and *distribution* as a group. Such an investigation must make a generous field-work commitment as it is in this milieu that these placenames thrive. It should be feasible in an area which is rich in such placenames to establish their present role, and it should also be possible to establish the nature and rate of change in the cultural landscape, besides isolating modification in social organization and orientation. Difficulties abound in such a procedure, not least in arriving at a satisfactory operational definition of *corporate placenames.* Usage and awareness of such placenames are the fundamental parameters necessary for definition, as well as the fact that certain placenames will denote group location relationships. The geographical study of corporate placenames requires that each individual placename must be reckoned with in terms of its membership of a group, just as every individual who is familiar with each name is also a member of a special group.

Under each of the above headings (*origin, form, function* and *distribution*), a number of research problems are isolated, and, following this, a series of research procedures are suggested in an attempt to resolve some of the problems.

Regarding origin, a range of questions require clarification, for example, that of identifying the special attributes of the bestower of placenames. What are the factors which govern the naming of certain features and, conversely, why others are apparently not given names? There is also the problem of identifying the manner of exactly how placenames become accepted among a group of people and thereby gain their currency.

Regional and local variations, in terms of generic placenames, should facilitate the estimation of the nature of inputs by different cultural groups into the making of distinctive cultural landscapes, and, perhaps, also provide some indication of the kind of acculturation which may have occurred between different groups in certain areas.

For the geographer function is perhaps the most challenging aspect of corporate placename analysis, for example, what roles do placenames presently discharge? How far and to what degree does function of a placename determine its life span? Or alternatively, in what manner does place function underwrite the currency and maintenance of a particular placename? Does a change in place function result in

the creation of a new placename? A crux in this respect is that both placenames and the places associated with them may possess several different functions. Another area which requires attention concerns the isolation of the processes which engender the obsolescence of placenames and ultimately brings about their death.

Finally, a series of research procedures may be invoked in the study of placename distribution and density. Such an approach could involve placing emphasis upon individual names, special categories of names, or, indeed, the entire body of placenames littered over a particular territory. Studies of this kind ought to aid in revealing the dynamic nature of the group place relationship. Density analysis should clarify the factors responsible for the internal variation of place usage, or alternatively, its avoidance. There remains also the task of devising a system of placename classification so as to facilitate pursuit of some of these objectives. The making of such a taxonomy will depend upon the objectives of the study envisaged. Potentially, it could be founded upon any of the four main approaches or various combinations of them.

Live placenames offer enormous possibilities for behavioural research, the only major handicap associated with them as sources being that a generous commitment to field-work is essential. Moreover, it is quite unlikely that the placenames alone will convey adequate detail to the researcher in his efforts to piece together and arrive at a satisfactory explanation regarding their pedigree and role. For a full explanation all available evidence is potentially relevant, whether garnered from the archive or the field.

Each placename is created and bestowed by a "namer", but obviously such an individual must possess some special attributes if his creations are going to be accepted. Every member of a rural community is a potential "namer" and everybody in such groups participates in the naming process. However, it would appear that some people in certain Irish rural communities have attained special status by common assent within the group. This kind of rank has been attained by them through an acknowledgment of their peculiar skills and dexterity as story-tellers, or their proficiency as mediums interpreting the relationship between placenames, places and people. Such people, invariably men, vaunt their special expertise concerning the pedigree and origins of placenames in heated discussions, in their own homes, as *cuartaíocht* held locally or even in public houses. In rural Irish-speaking West Mayo, as, indeed, through the remainder of Irish-speaking Ireland, such boisterous discussions are commonplace between the acknowledged experts, each one of whom is listened to eagerly by audiences of all ages and sexes, and, generally, the most plausible and persuasive agreement holds the day. It is more than likely that such people are believed to possess the ability to originate new placenames, even in areas which are already relatively densely named. In Kilgalligan, Co. Mayo, as a consequence of subsequent investigation it was only possible to identify the namer of less than a half dozen names out of a total of more than 800.[8] In each case, it turned out to be one of the primary informants.

In other cases the identification of the "namer" may be more easily traced,

[8] S. Ó Catháin and P. O'Flanagan, *The Living Landscape: Kilgalligan, Erris, Co. Mayo*, Dublin 1975.

especially when additional information is available. Placenames which refer to past incidents are a case in point. One difficulty which must be initially resolved is to attempt to establish whether the placenames refer to authentic or fictitious events or incidents. At the outset ficticious event names would have to be omitted from the reckoning. Authentic events would have to be witnessed by one or more of the inhabitants. The places where such events are believed to have occurred are christened with a name so as to crystalize the events by anchoring them to a place and thereby institutionalising them as landmarks. The role of the witnesses is crucial in this respect as they act as midwives for the birth of the names. The practice of nicknaming seems in certain respects to be an analogous device, as people are distinguishable from others in their families by being labelled with names and making them "landmarks" in a group. Serious problems are encountered in an attempt to isolate the namers of physical features or elements of the supernatural landscape. These kinds of difficulties mainly stem from the age of these names and also from the general absence of supplementary data referring to the origin of these names.

Allied to the foregoing discussion is the assessment of the mechanisms responsible for determining how a newly coined placename became current within a community. Any tightly knit group of people who remain tied to townland contexts in Ireland collectively discharge a vital role as they act as filters which govern the acceptance, or even the rejection, of a newly born name. The nature of the groups social and economic organization may also influence the manner and speed in which a new name becomes current. In this respect the number and duration of face-to-face contacts amongst the group is significant, as it is, after all, the normal way through which information is exchanged, and an evaluation of this can only be accomplished by painstaking observation in the field.

In most of the barony of Erris, Co. Mayo, and in some other parts of rural Ireland, the process of information diffusion is rapidly accelerated by the fact that every house is within shouting distance of its nearest neighbour.[9] Throughout each day, married women are particularly involved in these shouting exercises, during which news is swiftly diffused. Daily trips to local wells, by women and children alike, the daily tending of stock and their housing in the evening, as well as the search for vagrant youngsters at nightfall, offer various opportunities for these contacts. The menfolk meet in fields, on the roads, in the course of their weekly visits to church or to collect the dole, and also in frequent and sometimes extended visits to the public house. It would appear that through such contacts names become accepted and subsequently used. It is also likely that the naming process is accelerated in an area of clustered, rather than dispersed, settlement, where more frequent daily interaction is likely to take place between the inhabitants.

Are placenames being created in the same manner in areas where isolated settlements dominate the local scene? What about the situation in areas where depopulation is rampant? Are new placenames being born in such circumstances? Are as many corporate placenames being coined in English-speaking sectors of rural Ireland,

[9] P. Flatrès, "Hamlet and Village", in *Man and His Habitat, Essays presented to Emyr Estyn Evans* (edited by R. H. Buchanan, Emrys Jones and D. McCourt), London 1971.

where a small farm economy is being practised and where numerous daily interpersonal contacts are frequent? These, and many other research problems, require urgent clarification before the social fabric associated with the small farm economy is enveloped by change.[10]

There are other aspects of the naming process which beg for explanation. For example, there is the question of explaining the selective emphasis of the process. Potentially every space, both visible and invisible in any territory may be bestowed with a name, but it is common to encounter many features that are apparently not named. Usually, all of the prominant physical features have been named, such as the headlands, cliffs, river valleys and hills, as well as the majority of the significant man-made features, such as the houses and roads or tracks. Besides these, many seemingly featureless areas are named, and names which refer to past residents or particular biotic species are quite common in these areas. Taboo seems to be one of the most important factors influencing the non-naming of places; however, only supporting *seanchas* can shed light here.

In Kilgalligan, a fairy path is recognised as extending between two points, yet this path has not been bestowed with a name.[11] At the same time other *visible* and *invisible* features of the supernatural landscape have been *christened* with a name. It would appear that the relationship between the taboo and the naming process is a topic which merits more attention than it has heretofore been given.

Another factor which may influence the naming process is the general principle of rarity and abundance.[12] In most of Irish-speaking coastal Ireland, most of the easily recognizable physical features have been endowed with straight-forward generic toponyms such as, *alt, fothair or sceirí*. Few rare generic terms crop up. Similarly, most of the most frequent biotic species, including man, are represented in the placenames, but in some areas the numerically predominant ones are sometimes strangely omitted. By itself, in any area, the existing placename evidence alone spells a clear warning. It is that it would be always unwarranted to attempt to infer relationships from placename evidence alone, even in areas where living placenames are vibrant. Neither would the exclusive dependence on placenames provide a balanced insight into past economic or social conditions in any given area. Hence the vital importance of other evidence. It is clear that the naming process is highly complex even in areas where new names are being born. Further complexity in the unravelling of the naming process is added by the varying perceptions of different societies, even in an area as small as Ireland, with its spatial variation expressing, for example, rural economic and social organization, population density and settlement type.

In the study of placenames, *form* is an area where the geographer must work in close co-operation with the linguist. Much collection is required before the geographer can make a contribution. In a recent publication,[13] the wide ranging and bewildering variation of generic names given to Man's creations on, and modifications of the

[10] Few painstaking observer anthropological studies have been conducted in Ireland exception of R. Cressewell, *Une Communauté Rurale de l'Irlande*, Institute d'Ethnologie, Paris 1969.
[11] Ó Catháin and O'Flanagan, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-196.
[12] G. R. Stewart, *Names on the Globe*, Oxford and New York 1975.
[13] I. H. Adams, "Agrarian Landscape Terms: a glossary for historical geography", *Institute of British Geographers, Special Publication No. 9*, London 1976.

landscape are meticulously outlined. This kind of work highlights the potential of the study of *form* in disentangling contributions of varying cultural groups to the nomenclature of the agrarian landscape. The study of *form* also offers opportunities for the establishment of how different societies have accepted, rejected, or modified, innovations. In addition, the arrival of an immigrant group into an already occupied area may be reflected in placename form. The kinds of names which such new people may spawn are among the first registers of their presence, and the form in which they survive may often be viewed as a sensitive indicator of the fortunes of the group in question.[14]

The analysis of placename *function* is a domain where the geographer can make a distinctive contribution. In an examination of the role of corporate placenames a two-tiered approach is warranted, firstly focusing upon individual placenames, and, secondly, clarifying the role of the body of placenames. On the level of the individual placename, an initial difficulty needing attention revolves around establishing how many separate roles each name has, and which, if any, is the principal function. The range of potential functions for placenames has been considered elsewhere. However, individual placenames show a common purpose as they all serve as points in an overall reference system, each one denoting a distinct location. In this way each placename may he considered as a signpost, acting as it does as a symbol for those who are conscious of its existence.

Most placenames also possess some sort of evaluative designation, for example many toponyms are either prefixed or suffixed by adjectives which often highlight some of the qualities of the places in question, in terms of, for example, aspect, colour, shape and size. Frequently, the primary function of each name is indicated by its supplementary adjuncts. These adjuncts may refer to possession, commemoration, utility or hazard. *Carraig an tSrotha*, The Rock of the Current, provides an example: its distinctive name separates it from all other rocks, and also may locate it; the name also refers to the presence of a current which supplements its hazard qualities.[15] It is rare that any name possesses more tban three functions, though additional information available in *seanchas* may intimate additional roles such as commemoration or possession, actual or former.

Many placenames which were originally created acknowledging occupational roles or as denoting ownership have been maintained in spite of change. Such changes may involve the discontinuance of the activity in question or, perhaps, transfer of possession. Strangely, no new placenames have been created mirroring the new roles of the locations. This emphasises that placename function and place function are not always identical. It is likely that some kind of relationship must exist between placename function and the life span of a placename. It would not be unjustified to assert that placenames which discharge several key functions are likely to outlive those which simply distinguish one area from another.

The demise of certain categories of placenames may sometimes serve as an index

[14] M. Kaups, "Finnish Placenames in Minnesota: A Study in Cultural Transfer", *Geographical Review*, 56 (1966), 377-398.
[15] Ó Catháin and O'Flanagan, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

of more general social change. One of the most significant processes at work today throughout parts of rural Ireland is the strengthening of ties between town and country, and this process is simultaneously weakening the bonds of localized tightly knit societies. In the literature this aspect of contemporary social transformation is frequently referred to as the alteration of *closed societies* into *open societies*. Corporate placenames are usually associated with closed societies. The demise of commemorative placenames is likely to be indicative of such changes. Commemorative placenames act as archives for closed societies and, when local history no longer enshrines any didactic overtones or immediacy as a norm governing local behaviour, they will pass out of general usage. Archives of this kind are only significant for local reference as they embody the essence of an event in a name, and in this way they provide local history with a physical existence. In closed societies commemorative names display an apparent contradiction, that is, they refer to a completed past and to the present where they thrive still. It is likely that the non usage of such a name class would serve to spotlight changing rural social organization and orientation. It is doubtful whether a large body of corporate placenames could be accommodated in open society conditions as in the main they would serve no critical function.

Recent language shift within a community must also be reflected in the status of a body of corporate placenames. The relationship between language shift and placenames has received scant attention. What, for example, have been the fortunes of such placenames throughout the barony of Erris which has recently experienced a massive shift of language?

On the other hand, a body of placenames may exercise several functions at different levels for individual members of a community. Occupation, age, sex and status, will be among the major factors controlling who knows and who uses different names in a community. A follow-up sample of six people in Kilgalligan yielded the following results.[16] Each was asked to indicate awareness of each name and whether they could locate it or not. Fifty names were chosen randomly, and the results were as follows: the children were aware of about 40% of the names but could locate only 17% of them while the adults knew 87% of the names and could locate 74% of them. From such a limited exercise it would not be worthwhile to suggest even tentative conclusions, except to call for further analysis of placename awareness within a community.

In grappling with placename function the fundamental task involves the isolation of the group of placenames in question. Field observation, noting especially awareness and usage, is the primary basis for definition. In some parts of rural Ireland, including some of the principle Irish-speaking areas, the townland serves as the fundamental stage for community life. In some areas, however, a series of townlands may be strongly linked to each otber by economic, social and traditional bonds. Each townland has, like its inhabitants, a number of placenames whicb live only in the minds of the people there. A novel definition of community in such areas could utilize placename consciousness as an index.

In the 1970s, in rural Ireland, few townlands remain wherein most of the people spend their entire lives. Rural depopulation, technical improvement and structural

[16] Survey conducted in June 1977 (unpublished).

change in agriculture, tourism, rural industrialization and changing occupation aspirations of the young, are among the most potent influences promoting the decay of townland-based communities.[17] Collectively, these and other processes are leading to the diminution of the importance of townland boundaries as the frontiers of local social and economic networks. An assessment of the vitality of corporate placenames in such areas, in the light of the encroachment of these agents of change, helps to build up a more general view of the processes governing continuity and change in certain sectors of rural Ireland.

Geographers have not been idle in the analysis of placenames distribution, though, strangely, most of the work has involved large rather than small areas. Micro distributional studies are likely to reveal much about the relationship between groups and their intimate surroundings. These approaches may be envisaged in such confines. The analysis of the overall distribution in such territories would yield a general measure of Man's taming and modifving the landscape. Furthermore, a study of the distribution of a particular name class, supernatural names for example, would provide an insight into interrelationship between behaviour and taboo. Finally, emphasis on the distribution of particular types of placenames, those referring to improvement for example, would shed light upon the former and current structure of the rural economy. Origin and distribution of names is significant as these factors may influence placename function.

The colonization of an area for the first time by an immigrant group potentially offers unlimited opportunities for naming, and the type of names bestowed by such a group, may encapsulate their first impressions of such a territory.[18] Secondary internal colonization and consolidation may be signalled by the presence of different types of names. The arrival of a new immigrant group in an already occupied area, for example the Palatines in Ireland, might prompt the sowing of a new crop of names, and the analysis of the spatial relationship, if any, between the different placenames may produce vital clues regarding the type of connections between the two or more groups of people.[19]

Most locations given names do not appear to possess definite boundaries with their nearest neighbours, some agrarian units excepted, enclosure units and their names for example. Thus, as usage ebbs and flows so may also the size of spaces occupied by the names and consequently their distribution and density. Density of placenames in any area will be strongly related to the nature of the activities undertaken at these locations. The more complex the activities, the more likely it is that more names will mirror the activities concerned. It is likely that such a complexity, and hence a high density of placenames, will be most frequently found in coastal areas where the activities of communities is more wide-ranging, involving both fishing and farming pursuits. Only further field-work will test this assertion.

Most groups of placenames, whether obsolete or alive, are usually characterised

[17] W. J. Smyth, "Continuity and Change in the Territorial Organisation of Irish Rural Communities", *Maynooth Review*, 1 (1975), 51-78.
[18] G. R. Stewart, *Names on the Land*, (revised and enlarged edition) Boston 1958.
[19] G. B. Adams, "Language and Man in Ireland", *Ulster Folklife*, 15 (1969), 141-171.

by extraordinary heterogeneity, hence the necessity of sorting so as to facilitate their analysis. Classification is amongst the most expeditious methods for telescoping a complex set of data into some general order. Many avenues of classification are available, and ultimately the kind of method chosen should be governed by the ultimate objectives of the study involved. Systems of classification can be devised on the basis of placename origin, form, function or distribution. Linguistic criteria would require to be invoked in the cases of classifications based upon origin or form, while behavioural and spatial characteristics would be noted in functional or distributionally orientated taxonomies.

To be effective, a scheme of classification focused upon the functional attributes of corporate placenames would be obliged to draw heavily upon all other available information, as well as the names.[20] In this way the roles of both individual and groups of placenames can be isolated and interpreted. Such a group of placenames, functionally classified, would help to reveal the general view of a distinct group of people to their surroundings and also to each other. It would also facilitate an estimation of the nature and rate of local socio-economic change. Placenames of this kind, like people, wax and wane and the understanding of the forces which prompt their maintenance or decay must be of prime importance to the geographer.

[20] D. McCourt, "The Use of Oral Tradition in Irish Historical Geography", *Irish Geography*, 6 (1972), 394-410.

Miscellanea

TWO FLAT BRONZE AXEHEADS FROM KNOCKANINAUN, CO. CLARE

In 1971, Mr. James Hickey of Ivy Hill, Inch, Ennis, Co. Clare, discovered a pair of flat axeheads of bronze under a large boulder on his land at Knockaninaun.[1] The boulder, which was incorporated in the base of an old stone field-wall, was described by him as being huge, having a hollow on its upper surface and as taking "days to remove". The axeheads were found lying flat, side by side, under the stone and presumably constituted a small hoard. No measurements of the boulder were made at the time of discovery and whether the rock occurred naturally or whether it was a collapsed standing stone is a matter for conjecture. If the former, the axes may merely represent personal possessions concealed for safety, if the latter, then it might be argued that the hoard represented some form of ritual deposit. The lack of evidence on this point emphasises once again the necessity for prompt reporting of all archaeological discoveries to allow of scientific recording.

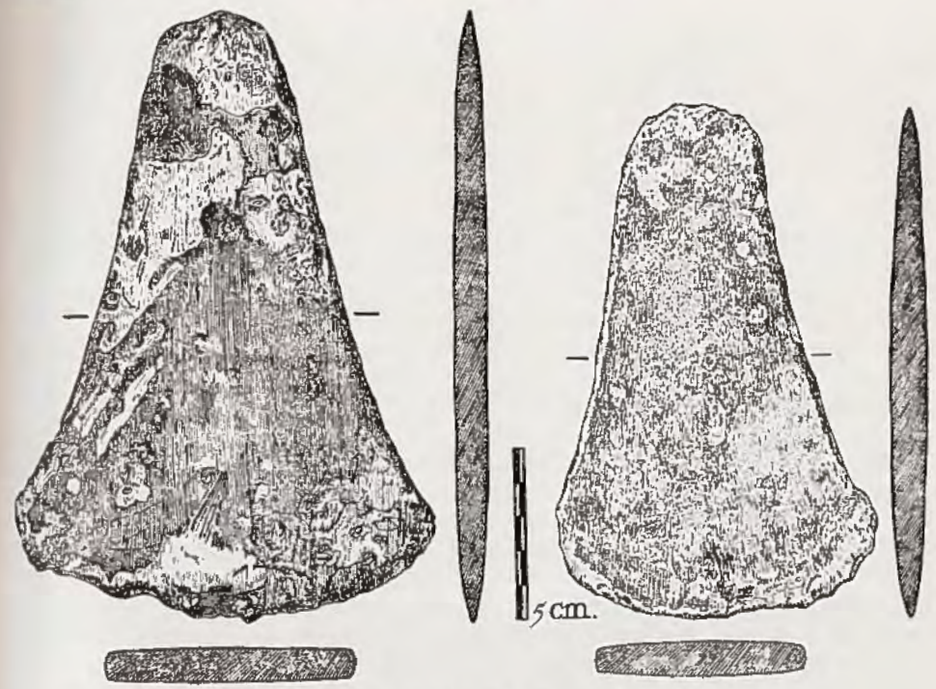

Fig. 1. Bronze axeheads from Knockaninaun, Co. Clare.

[1] Td. Knockaninaun; Par. Drumcliff; Bar. Islands; Co. Clare; O.S. 6-inch sheet 41.