

Granite Dry Stone Walls and Ditches of the Blackstairs in South Carlow – 1

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



Photo: Annabel Konig

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Granite Dry Stone Walls and Ditches of the Blackstairs in South Carlow – A Broader View

The granite dry stone walls and ditches of the Blackstairs in south Carlow occur in a wide area some of which is beyond the scope of this report. These are areas of the rural landscape where stones have been cleared from the land and used to form field boundaries. They can be loosely divided into upland areas where the land is likely to have been reclaimed, and more lowland areas where the land is more fertile. Michael Conry who has written about various aspects of stone building in County Carlow divides the walls into two types which he calls, consumption walls and coping walls, in his book *The Carlow Fence, Traditional Granite Fencing & Dry Stone Walls in County Carlow*. Consumption walls are often very thick walls, one to three metres, and in one case that we have found, five metres, and between one and two or more metres high. These walls are known locally as ditches. Conry calls them consumption walls because they consume so many stones, they are veritable stores of stones, and are usually found in the upland areas. Coping walls are more like the walls that are found in other parts of Ireland, they may be two or three stones thick and have rows of coping stones at the top. These are similar to what is known as a double wall on the Aran Islands,¹ and they are often found bordering the road, and some were built in response to government grant schemes. The field boundary system includes stone artefacts such as *geataí* which are described in Part 3.

The early conclusions of the study were as follows:

the future existence of the dry stone walls is precarious, because it is clear to us that in Dranagh alone stone walls have been removed in pursuit of progressive farming in recent years, and we expect to encounter a similar pattern elsewhere;

traditional farming methods and knowledge about how to farm this kind of landscape are on the wane and are being practised mainly by farmers in the 70 -90 years old age group;

immediate action is required to record what remains of the stone wall landscape;

farmers require support to continue traditional farming practices in parallel with the conservation of the agricultural landscape.

Methodology

The methodology of this research has been to look at one upland townland in detail, the townland of Dranagh, and, to take a broader view of the townlands in general, to identify areas where dry stone wall field patterns continue to exist in varying degrees of intactness. Many of the

¹ Laheen, M. *Drystone Walls of the Aran Islands: Exploring the Cultural Landscape* (Cork, Collins Press, 2010)

field boundaries are shown on the First Ordnance Survey of 1839, and in general, further field boundaries have been made by the time of the 25" OS in 1905. Since 1905, some field boundaries have been lost.

For the broader study a desktop methodology has been used to compare the 25" OS map of 1905 with the Orthographic OS map of 2005. Dry stone wall field patterns that still exist, or existed in 2005, are highlighted and enclosed with a red line. These are areas where further study would be worthwhile, particularly where existing walls are under threat. Raising awareness in the community and particularly among farmers about the value of such landscapes is the first step towards securing the future of these important elements of our cultural heritage.

The townlands in the wider area that were surveyed using a desktop methodology are: Knockroe, Raheendarragh, Crannagh, Ballynattin, Currane, Ballinree, Curranree and Ballinasillogue, for maps of these see figures 1 – 6. Some townlands came to our attention through reading Michael Conry's book *The Carlow Fence* The heritage value of others became evident in the course of the work. The broader study has led us to conclude that the intact landscape particularly in the upland areas is a unique and important store of cultural heritage. The list is not exhaustive, on the contrary, it is certain that other townlands of the Blackstairs exist, in which there are important field systems, and farms still using traditional methods. Those that we have become aware of so far but have not surveyed are: Rathnageeran, Knockmulgurry and Ballyglisheen. These townlands should be part of further research.

Knockroe *An Cnoc Rua*, Raheendaragh *Ráithín Darach*, and Crannagh *An Chrannach* are examples of upland townlands, where the upper reaches of the townland has been reclaimed and the fields enclosed with dry stone ditches, see Figures 1, 2 and 3. Each of the upland townlands has a large areas of mountain land (about 500 acres in each case). In earlier times this land would have been farmed collectively. It would be interesting to see in further research whether the townland system of sustainable land units still applied to these areas in the nineteenth century. The pattern of dispersed land holding that is characteristic of the sustainable land unit system, while apparent in some parts is clearly not in use everywhere. These patterns can be discerned from the Griffiths Valuation maps of 1852. There may have been a drive on the part of some landlords to consolidate farms during the nineteenth century, after the famine when the population had drastically dropped.

The consolidation of farms is more evident in the lowland areas where the land is generally more fertile, and probably was a good deal less stony. In these townlands the field boundaries include what Michael Conry calls coping walls, and he describes them as follows:

Basically they consist of long straight dry stone walls with battered sides and a wider coping of irregularly shaped stones, standing on their edges on the top of the wall to deter livestock, particularly sheep from crossing them.²

² Conry, M.J. *The Carlow Fence: Traditional Granite Fencing and Dry Stone Walls in County Carlow* (Carlow, Chapelstown Press, 2000)

The lowland townlands surveyed in this study are Ballynattin *Baile an Aitinn*, Currane *An Corrán*, Ballinree *Baile an Rí*, Currenree *Cora an Fhraoigh* and Ballynasilloge *Baile na Saileog*, for maps see Figures 4, 5 and 6.

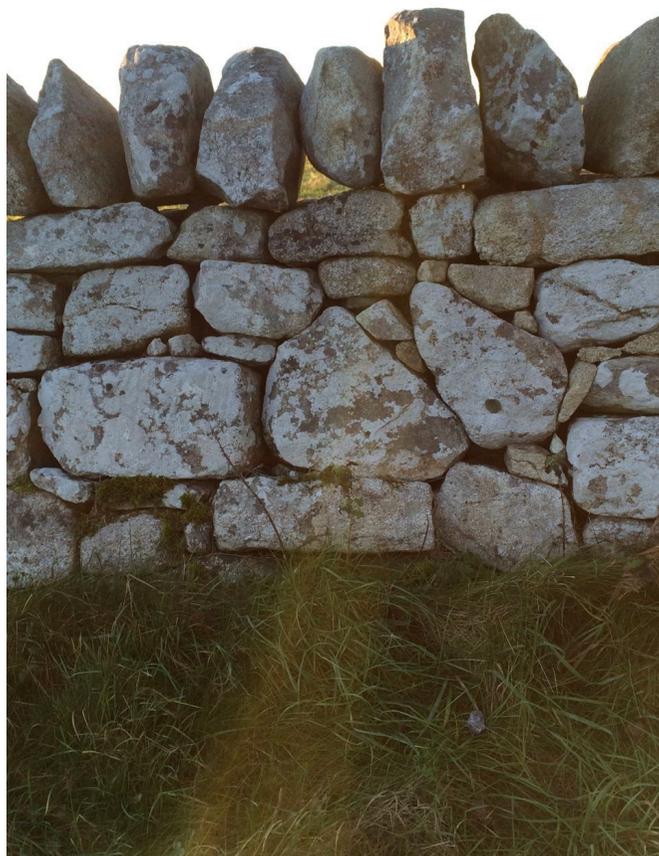


Figure 1. Coping walls in the townland of Ballynattin





Figure 2

knockroe county carlow - os ortho 2005 - 681086,648966 - license no. apl000011 14



Figure 3

raheendarragh county carlow - os ortho 2005 - 680790,653078 - license no. aploooo13 14

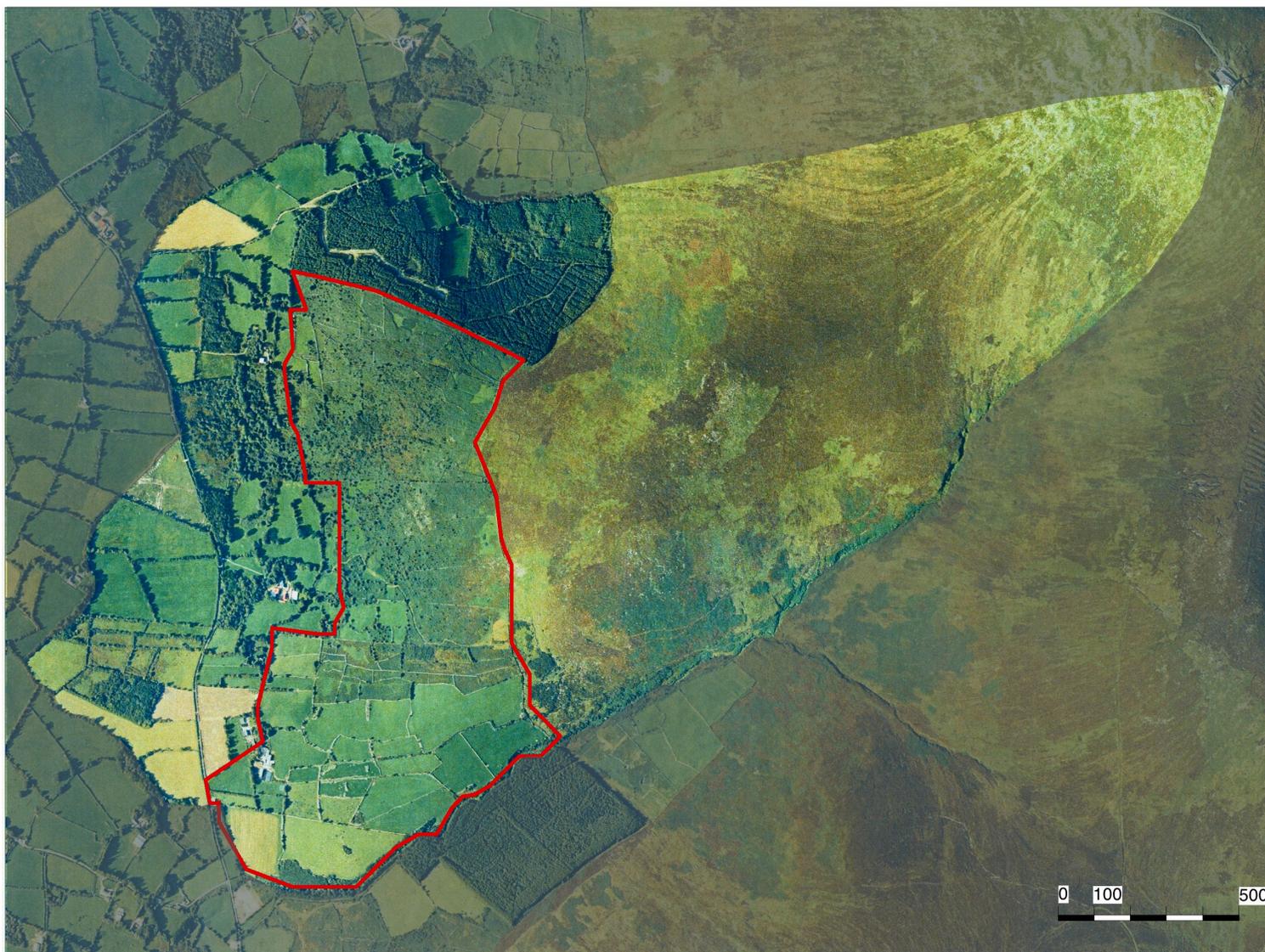
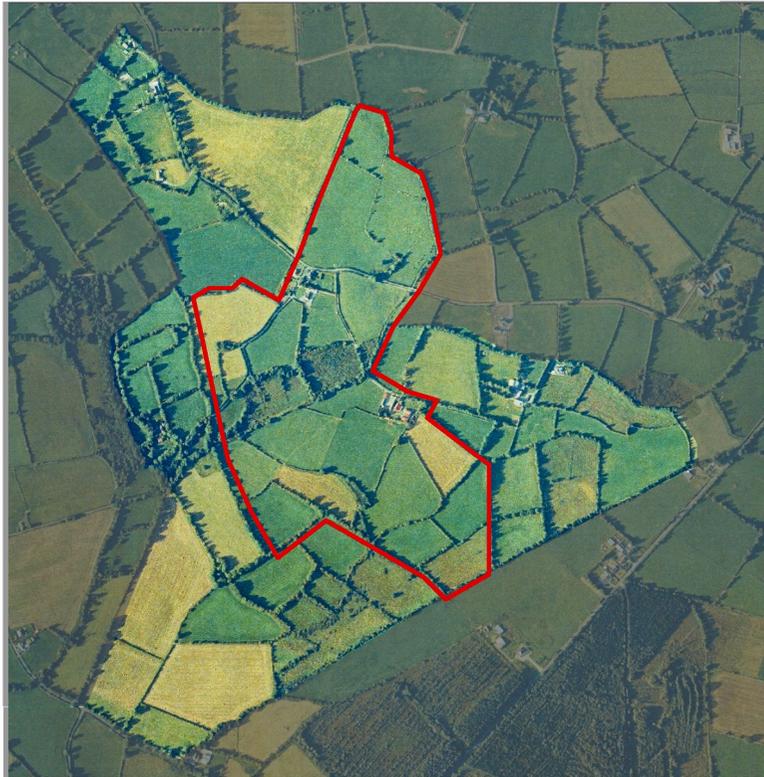


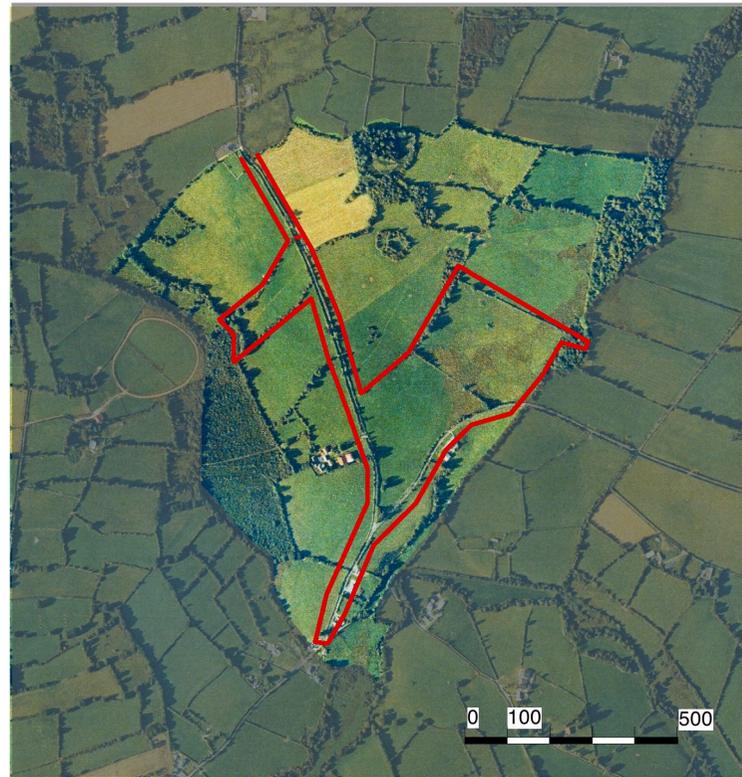
Figure 4

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curanree - county carlow - os ortho 2005 - 675609,656543
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Figure 5



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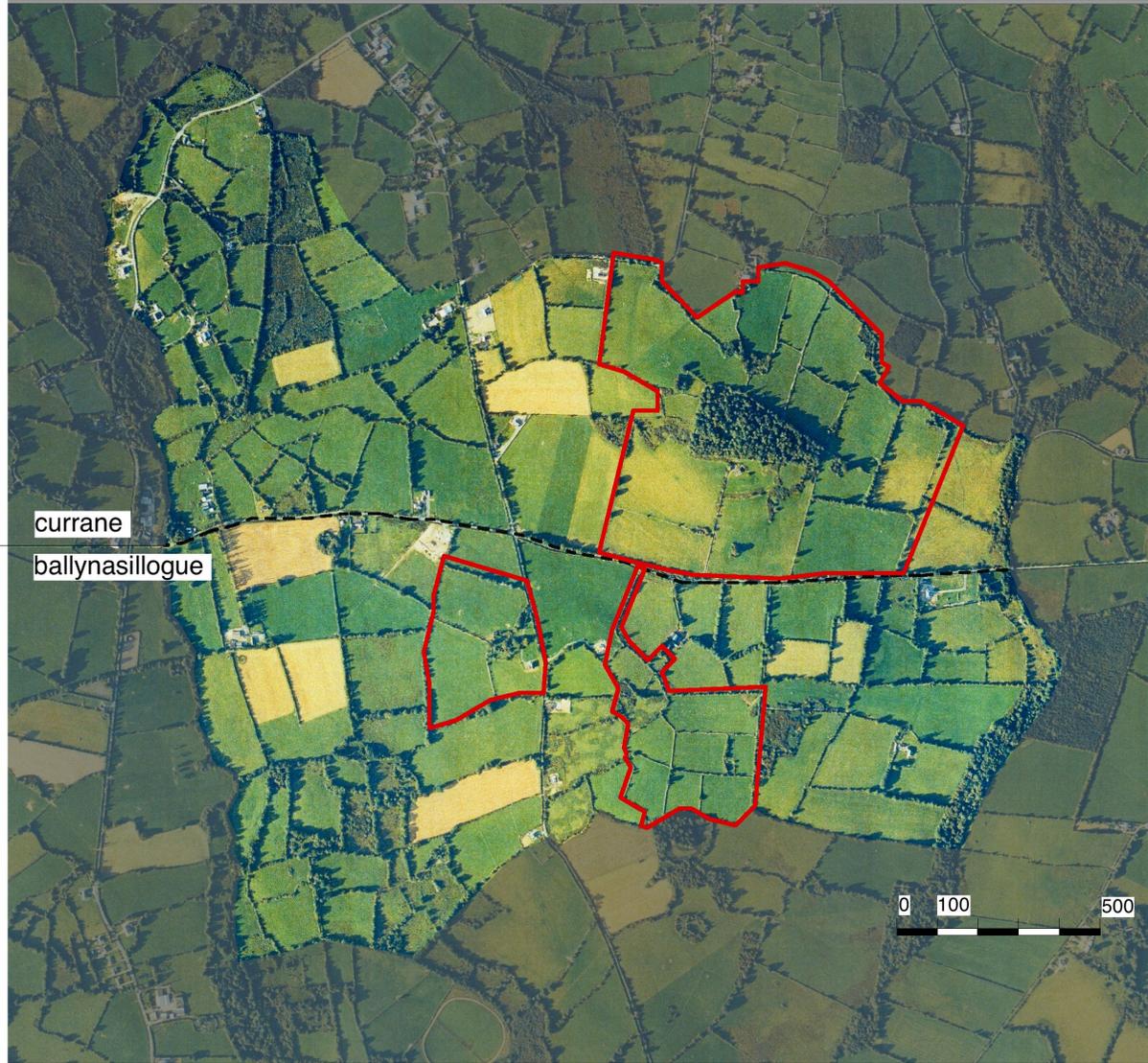


Figure 6. currane & ballynasilloge - county carlow - os ortho 2005 - 673724,652812 - license no. aploooo10 14



Figure 7

ballinree county carlow - os ortho 2005 - 676826,655798 - scale 1:10560 - license no. apl00009 14

Granite Dry Stone Walls and Ditches of the Blackstairs in South Carlow – 2



Granite Dry Stone Walls Ditches of the Blackstairs in South Carlow: Dranagh

Location and History

Dranagh is situated in the southern tip of South Carlow where the county narrows between the southward flow of the river Barrow and the mountain range of the Blackstairs veering southwest. It has a granite geology where glacial debris has been employed to enclose and order an agricultural landscape and settlement pattern for centuries. The townland rises from OD 200' at its western boundary to OD 1200' at Bantry Commons where the eastern boundary meets County Wexford. The name Dranagh, *Doireánach* means 'place of the blackthorns'. About two kilometres due west of Dranagh is the important Early Christian site of Saint Mullins.

Dranagh comprises about 1,075 acres, it is a large townland because a sizeable portion is less productive mountain land, its neighbouring townland to the north is Ballycrinnigan. The boundary they share is a drystone wall currently being studied together with other evidence of early upland settlement by archaeologist Seamus Ó Murchú.³ This - possibly very early - wall was the foundation for the townland boundary, and forms the edge to the field systems in the lowland area. See Figure 7.

In William Petty's Down Survey of 1656 the area of land in which Dranagh is situated, is described as 'unforfeited land belonging to Mr. Bryan Cavanagh Protestant'. The land stretches northwards from the Poulmonty river, is bounded to the east by the mountains that today we call the Blackstairs, and to the west by the river Barrow, and is interrupted before extending further north by the townlands of Ballycrinnigan and Ballyling. This land, in the Barony of Saint Mullins, was under the control of the Kavanaghs of Poulmonty Castle for some few hundred years before the Down Survey. There is a reference in the MacMurrough Kavanagh lineage⁴ to Art Oge Kavanagh of Polmonty, and Borris Idrone, in the reign of Henry 1V, 1399.

By 1768, Frizell was mapping the estates of Thomas Kavanagh in Carlow and Wexford and refers to Dranagh as:

'for the most part coarse Barren, Rocky, Mountain and Stoney and Heathy Pasture and the greater part of it not Improveable'.

³Ó Murchú, S *The Journal of Irish Archaeology* Volume XXI, 2012, 'Archaeology among the Blackthorns' p35-55

⁴ Ryan, J. *History and Antiquities of the County of Carlow*, Richard Moore Tims Dublin 1833, p. 369

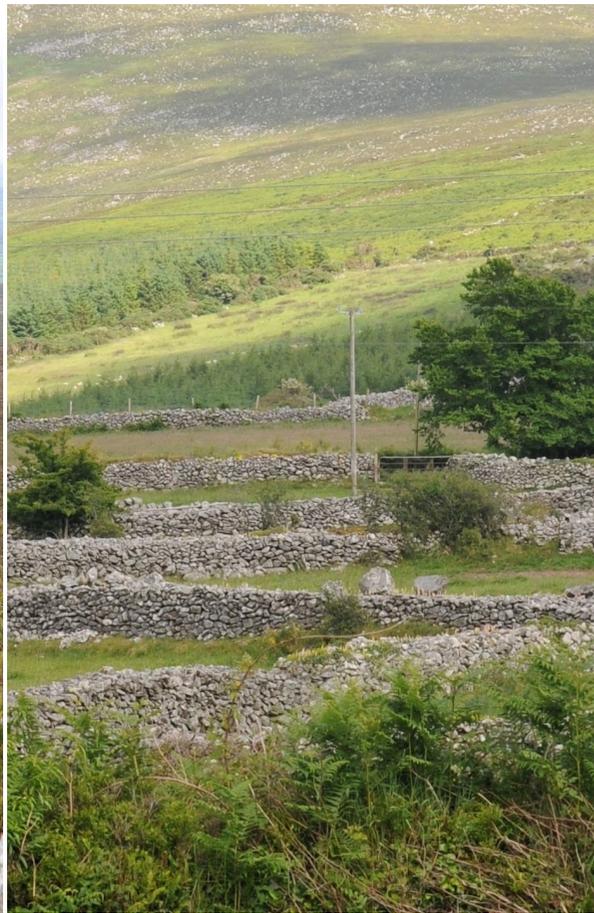
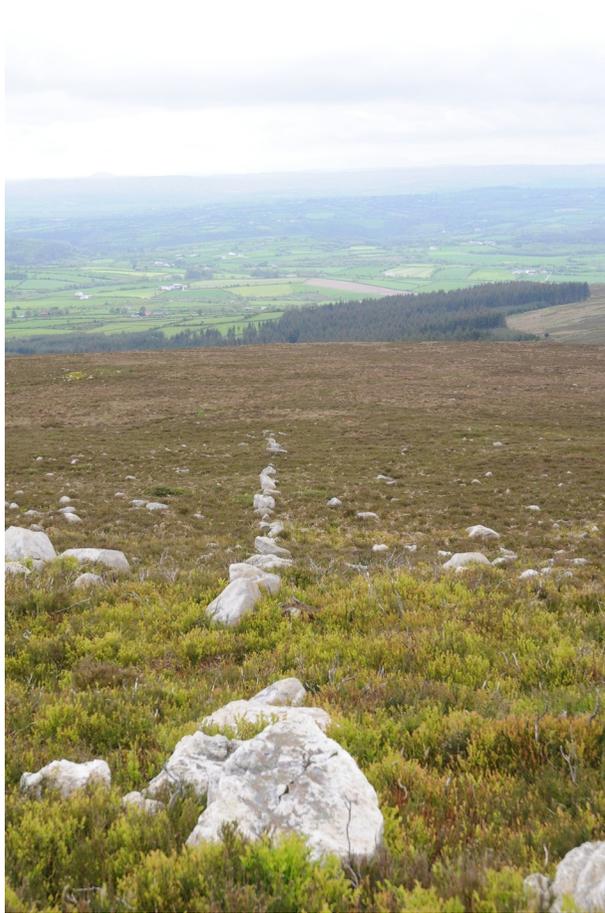


Figure 8. Townland boundary wall

Stone wall landscape

Stone ditch, 2.5m wide by 2m high

Frizell's map, Figure 9, is particularly interesting, because he outlines the different types of land available in the townland. From that series of maps it can be seen that the land is being used according to the ancient land division system of sustainable land units, in which the land holding is dispersed, so that each holding contains the different kinds of land available in the townland.⁵ The map at Figure 10. imposes Frizell's land types on the OS map of 1905. In 1847, the Kavanaghs had their estates mapped showing the tenants and acreages for each townland including Dranagh. In general, the

⁵ For more on this system see Laheen, M. *Drystone Walls of the Aran Islands: Exploring the Cultural Landscape* (Cork Collins Press 2010) Chapter 2 The Townland Matrix

information is very similar to that of Griffiths Valuation printed in 1852. See Figure 12. for the landholding pattern in Dranagh in 1852 as described in Griffith's Valuation. The 1905 25" Ordnance Survey map shows the various types of land in the townland, this is shown at Figure 11. By this time the ownership of the land in the townland had been transferred to the tenants under the Wyndham Act of 1903, ending a continuity of ownership of at least 500 years, and probably much longer.

Farming

Continuity exists, however in the farmers of the land. Frizell in 1768 refers to: "Harry O Neil on this farm Mr. Stewart reports to be the most improving tenant he had met with, and the most willing to (oblige?) him in his researches". The name Neill turns up again in the Tithe Applotment Books of 1834 for Dranagh, together with Byrne, Murphy, Morrissey, Roarke, Culleton, Doyle, Ryan, Geehan (Gahan), Dunphy, Kealy, Shanahan, Doyle and Bolger. There were 38 landholders in total. Eleven farmers were renting approximately 40 Irish acres, that is, 64 statute acres each, and one farmer, Patrick Byrne, had 100 statute acres. These were reasonably sized farms at the time. The surnames of the eleven larger farmers were: Byrne, Murphy, Neill, Roarke, Gahan/Geehan, Ryan, Dunphy, (there were several landholders with the same surname). Similar names are recorded in Griffith's Valuation of 1852, we have Byrne, Murphy, Morrissey, Neill, Rourke, Ryan, Geehan (Gahan), Dunphy, Kealy, Dalton. In the census of 1901, farmers had the same surnames with the addition of a family called Dwyer. By 1911, the Dwyers had gone, the other names remained with the addition of Crowe. Today, the farmers in Dranagh include: Byrne, Murphy, Kealy, Lawlor (nephew of Gahan, who died in recent years) Doyle, Ryan and O'Neill. A relative stability existed in the townland since 1834 and possibly since 1768 or before. There was a loss of smaller landholders between 1834 and 1852, possibly due to the Great Famine of 1847 and emigration.

Traditional farming methods including the building of stone ditches were transmitted from one generation to the next. In the centre of the townland there is an area to the east of the old road, which is clearly marked on Frizell's map, and described as 'arable, rocky, heathy and moory pasture'. This part, today, displays a relatively intact stone wall field boundary system, each farmer in the townland had a parcel in this area, at the time of Griffith's Valuation of 1852, comprising a total area of 180 acres. It is likely that this was the fertile part of the townland and may have been farmed collectively at one time. Within the area is Gahan's farm which is studied in more detail below. Near here was a group of small houses, now demolished, and a place known as 'the street'. Local folklore recounts that the last Gaelic speakers in County Carlow lived there in the middle of the nineteenth century. The mountain land and rough pasture that was held in common comes right down to what was the early settlement, which meant that there was access to the commonage from the village. In Griffith's Valuation the commonage is held by 'Patrick Byrne and others'.

Farmers also had parcels of land in the outer area that is described as 'pasture' on the 1905 OS, see figure 11. for types of land in the townland. Another parcel would have been in what Frizell calls the Bog. Today, farmers still call this place the bog, not for cutting turf, but a marshy area where animals used to be brought in summer, because there was plenty of water there. Some of this land was reclaimed in the 70s and 80s, Peter Kealy had a meadow for hay there this summer (2014). Farmers have mountain rights to the part of the mountain within Dranagh. Sheep farming was dominant on the mountain pasture until the end of the twentieth century. There was a traditional practice of burning the mountain in the summertime, to make the

pasture available to sheep. Many farmers do not use their mountain rights now, and much of it has turned to scrub. In winter time during very cold weather the sheep would take shelter by the stone walls. Snow drifts would pile up against the walls covering the sheep, the thick dry stone wall would allow air through, so the sheep could breathe. Michael O'Neill recalls looking for sheep on the mountain with Peter Kealey and finding them warm and alive in their snowy cavern.

There are two very obvious changes in the way that the land is now used; firstly, farming has become less diverse, there is no longer any tillage, see our recent survey in Appendix 1, dry stock and suckler cattle are now the main type of farming in Dranagh. Up to the end of the twentieth century, farmers sowed sugar beet and barley on alternative years. The sugar beet crop per acre was as good a yield as other places in Carlow, indicating that the land was fertile. Farmers grew wheat which was milled locally to produce their own flour. Potatoes were grown for sale and for their own use, and every family had a vegetable plot. (In conversation with Patrick Byrne and Peter Kealey, summer 2014). Secondly, some farms have been sold to Coillte, the state forestry company. The forested farms can be seen on the Ortho 2005 OS, Figure 13. While there are clear advantages to growing trees, the method of planting destroys the stone ditches, and to some degree disrupts the townland by reducing the amount of land farmed and separating farms from each other. Farms have also gotten larger, and farmers are fewer, this is one of the factors that makes traditional farming practice, including the building and repair of stone ditches difficult to achieve. The mountain pasture and rough pasture that used to be commonage has been slightly reduced. The small lozenge shaped part of the commonage that reads almost like a village green on the map, see figure 12. is now in private ownership. While there are some new houses in this location, the village no longer exists in the same way.

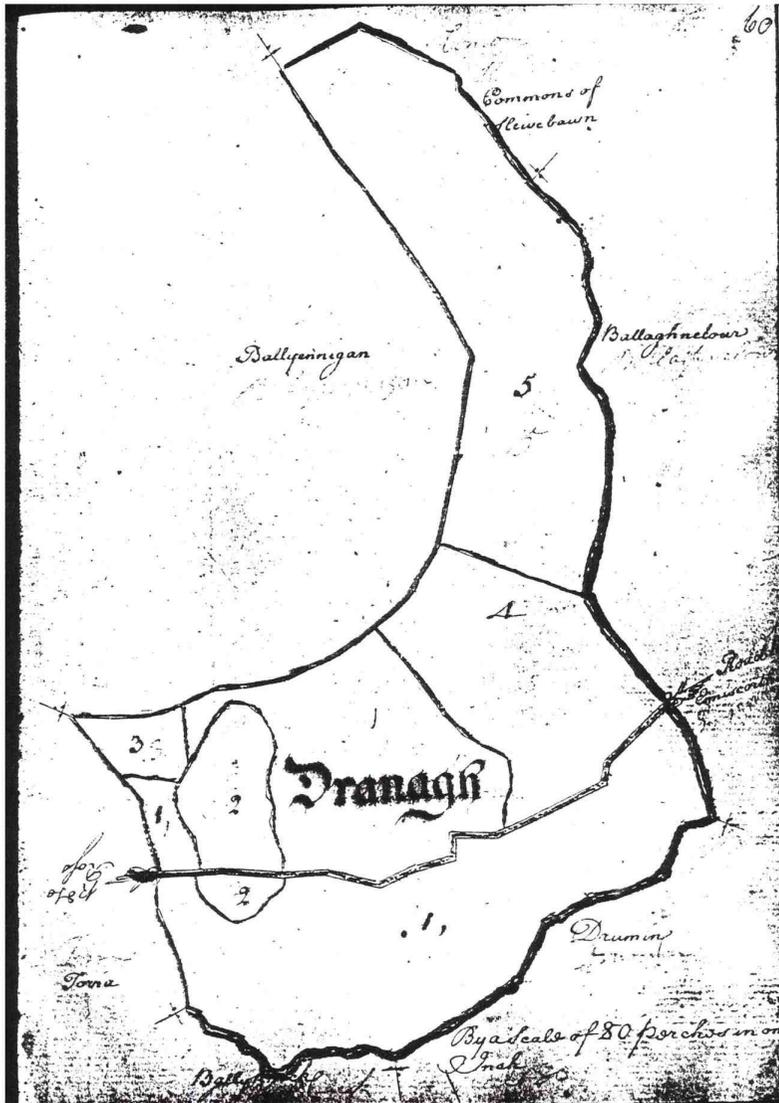


Figure 9 - Townland of Dranagh
1768 Frizell Map

Frizell when mapping the estates of Thomas Kavanagh in Carlow and Wexford in 1768, describes Dranagh as 'for the most part coarse Barren, Rocky, Mountain and Stoney and Heathy Pasture and the greater part of it not Improveable'.

He divides the townland as follows:

1. Arable, Rocky, Heathy and Moory pasture - 365. 1.8
2. Wood - 40. 3. 5
3. Bog - 13. 0. 3
4. Heathy and Rocky side of the mountain - 138.1.5
5. Barren mountain - 210.1.5

Total (Irish acres) - 767.2.1

'The Old New Ross Road'

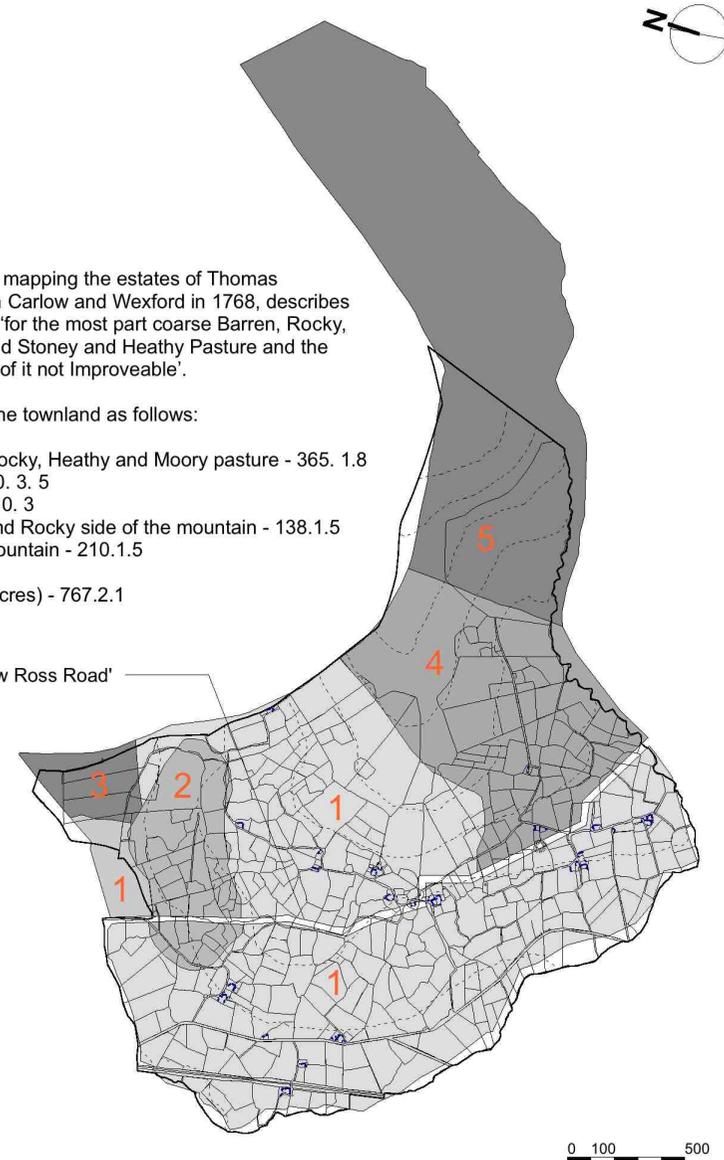


Figure 10 - Townland of Dranagh
1905 OS Map Overlaid With 1768 Frizell Map

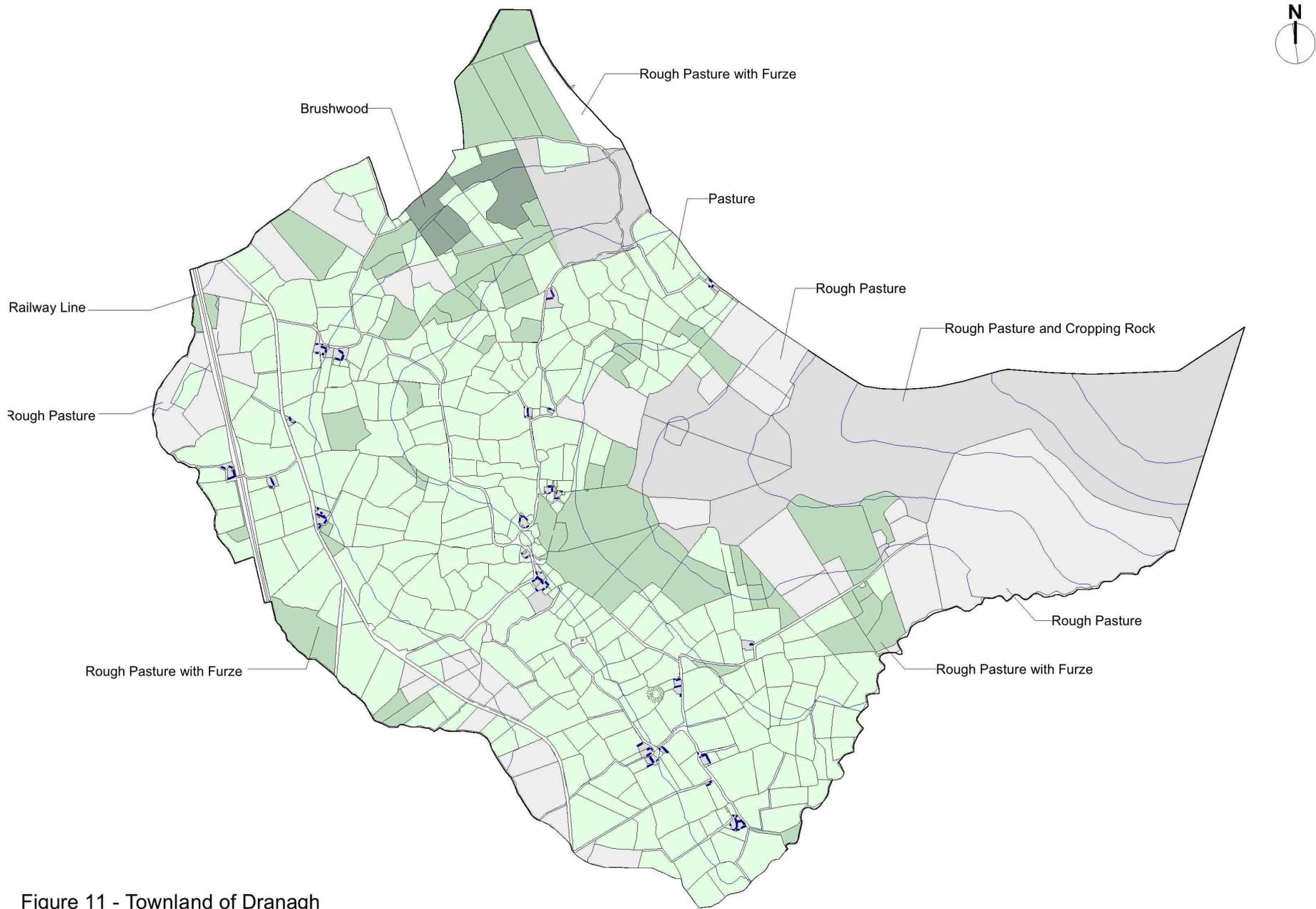


Figure 11 - Townland of Dranagh
1905 OS Map With Land Types Shown



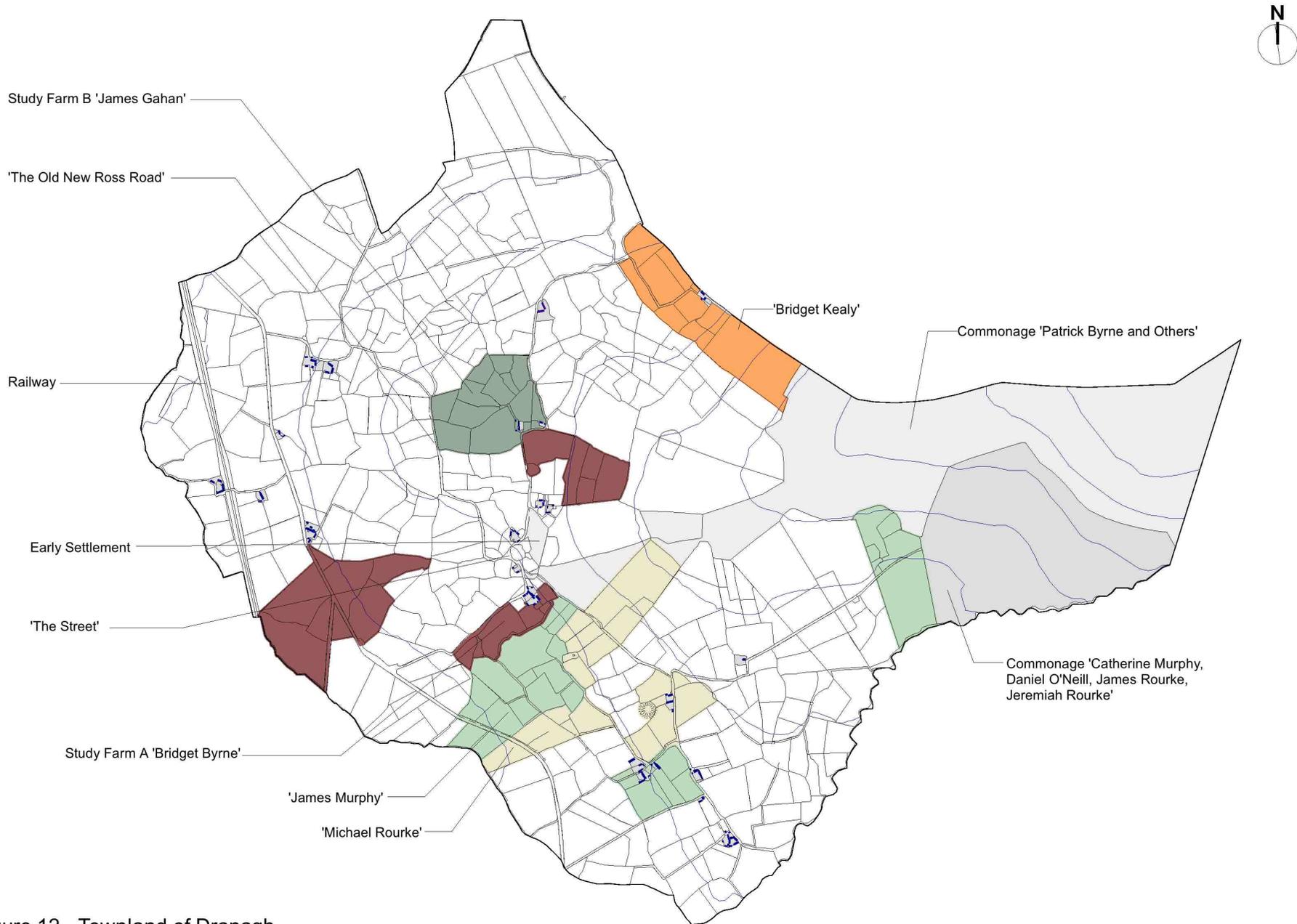


Figure 12 - Townland of Dranagh
 OS 1905 Overmarked To Show Some Example Farms In The 1852 Griffith's Valuation





Figure 13

dranagh county carlow - os ortho 2005 - 675970,638326 - license no. aploooo15 14

Granite Dry Stone Walls and Ditches of the Blackstairs in South Carlow - 3



Granite Dry Stone Walls and Ditches of The Blackstairs in South Carlow: Dranagh – Farm A and B

Both farms are typical holdings which include the various types of land that was available in the townland. Both have mountain and turbary rights. Farm A, Byrne's, has exceptional stone ditches in the vicinity of the farmstead. Farm B, Gahan's is exceptional because of the level of continuity demonstrated in the land holding. In this case the size and boundaries have not changed since 1852. The field boundaries which are stone ditches also remain the same.

Farm A

Byrne's farm is located close to the centre of the townland of Dranagh, it is a farm of about 120 acres, see Figure 17. It comprises part of the farm described in Griffith's Valuation of 1852, and other farms that have since been inherited or bought by the family. It is noteworthy not only because of the continuity of farming in that location since 1832, the date of the Tithe Applotments, but also because of its exceptional stone ditches. These are the largest known stone ditches on farmland in Ireland, some of them are five metres wide and two and a half metres high. The walls are described by Michael J. Conry in his book *The Carlow Fence* as follows:

In the townland of Dranagh, on the flattish top of a granite spur, many of the walls are twice as wide as they are high. The stone walls which are 1.67 to 1.90 metres high can be up to 3.10 to 3.30 metres wide at the top with relatively as straight sides. The largest boulders and round stones are in the bottom and side of the ditch with the smaller stones thrown into the centre of the wall. It would appear that a special effort was made to build the side of the wall, at least the upper portion, with rounded stones of similar size. While many of the walls can be straight from one end of the field to the other and roughly have the same dimensions in terms of height and width, many others can be quite crooked and very varied in width, ranging from 2.90 to 4.80 metres at the top in a short distance.'

Stone artefacts exist in these farms, such as *geata* / gothars, which is an opening in the wall at ground level for allowing sheep through from one field to the other. The openings are closed up with stones in a similar manner to the *bearna* or gap found on the Aran Islands. Stiles also exist for farmers and others to cross the wall without damaging it. Box gutters are common, these are drains made of stones, to allow water through from one field to another, or sometimes they are built under thick walls to drain the field, they can also be found crossing under roads and paths. Hidden storage spaces in the walls also occur.



Figure 14. Patrick Byrne at one of the stone ditches on his farm.



Figure 15. *Geata* at stone ditch to allow sheep to pass through



Figure 16. Micheal Byrne, father of Patrick. Photo taken from M. Conry's book *The Carlow Fence*

Patrick Byrne recalls ditches being built when he was child. It was the work of at least three men. His father, grandfather and an employed man used to spend every day working on the farm, which sometimes included building and repairing stone ditches. The stone ditches and the stone artefacts describe a system of farming that has almost ceased to exist. Due to the size of the stone ditches they are difficult to repair and maintain, especially when farmers are working on their own. It requires not just a family to be involved but an extended family or community where relatives and neighbours are available to help at crucial times of the year. For this reason the transfer of land to forestry has the effect of eroding the farming community.

These challenging issues are similar to those in other traditional farming landscapes such as the Burren, the Aran Islands and other parts of the world, where the societies and communities that supported the way of life have been eroded. Landscape and people are part of the same habitat, as it were, and the future depends on finding ways to move forward with land and community.

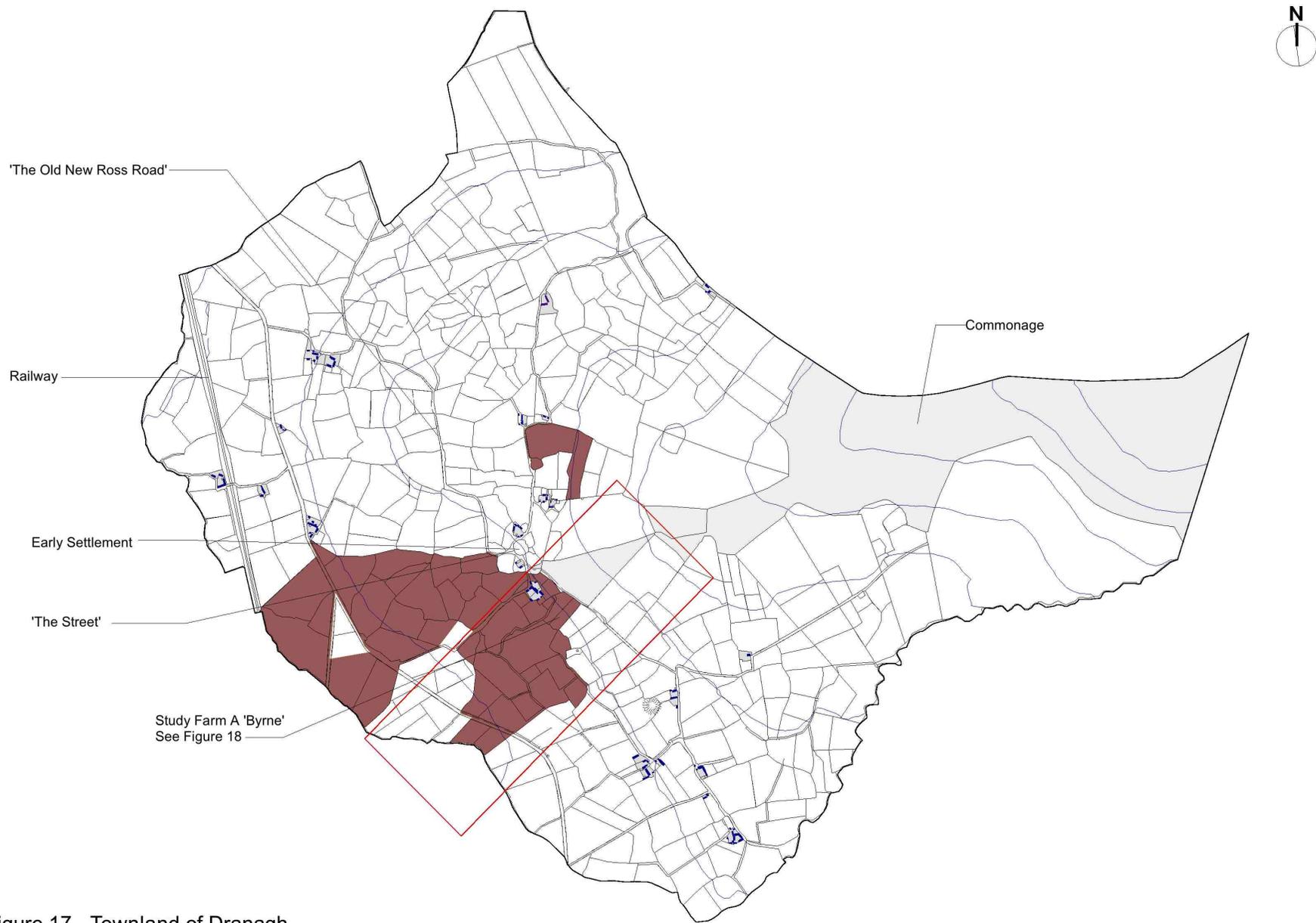
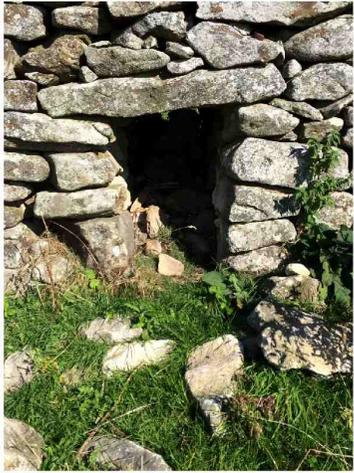


Figure 17 - Townland of Dranagh
OS 1905 Overmarked To Show Study Farm 'A' In 2014



Geata A - Between fields



Geata B - From field to commonage



Geata C - From field to commonage



D - Chamber constructed within the wall



E - Junction with wall now removed

Geata - Passage through walls sized to allow sheep to pass but not cattle



Figure 18 - Study Farm A 'Byrne'

Farm B

Gahan's farm is also located close to the centre of Dranagh, in the area of fertile land at the centre of the townland referred to above. It was a land holding of one parcel in Griffith's Valuation, 1852, which was unusual. See Figure 19. Later, another parcel in the 'bog' area was added to the farm. Since 1852 the boundary of the parcel has not changed, and very little changes have occurred to the field boundaries. This is a farm of exceptional continuity, which is currently being farmed by James Gahan's nephew. The wall bounding the old road to New Ross incorporates a standing stone, see photos at Figure 20, which has been the subject of local folklore. This was common practice when building walls, - to incorporate large stones that might have an earlier significance -. Rock art is also incorporated in a similar way, and important finds of rock art have occurred in Dranagh. Christiaan Corlett writing about such finds in his book *Inscribing the Rock Art of south Leinster* says;

'Both rock art boulders at Dranagh, Co Carlow, were found in drystone field fences, and site 2 only became visible when it fell out of the wall, highlighting the fact that many more examples of rock art are likely to be in a similar invisible position.'p27

The walls and ditches are likely to be reservoirs of rock art, which also points to earlier inhabitation of the area, as aspect that is currently being researched.

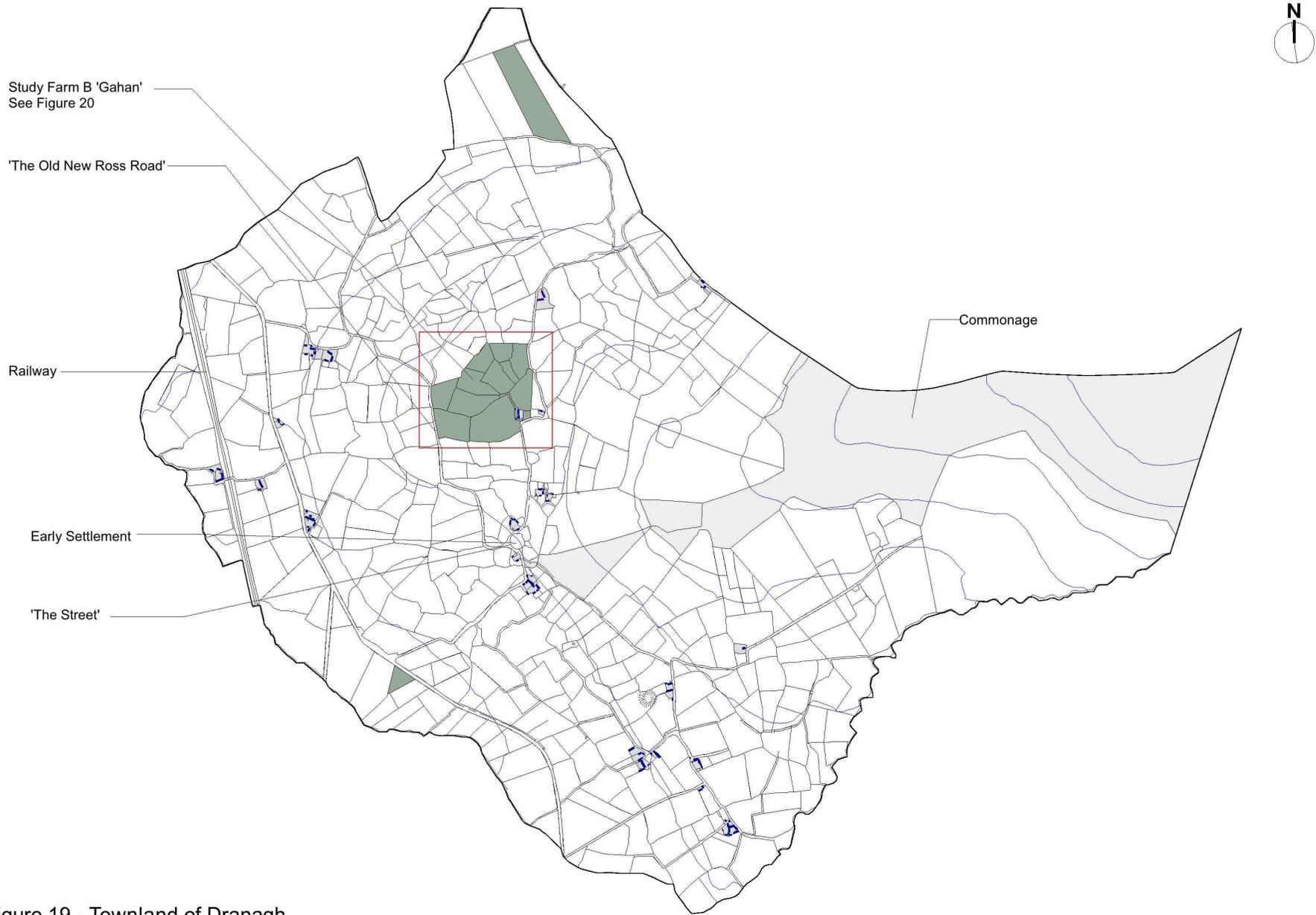
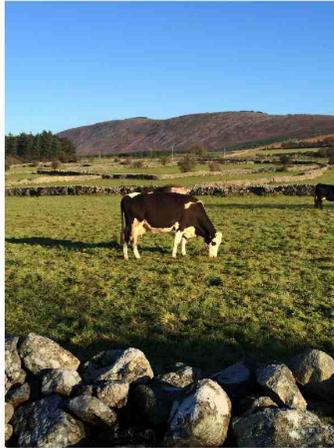


Figure 19 - Townland of Dranagh
 OS 1905 Overmarked To Show Study Farm 'B' In 2014



A - View west to Brandon Hill



B - View east to The Blackstairs



C - Opening between fields



D - Standing Stone



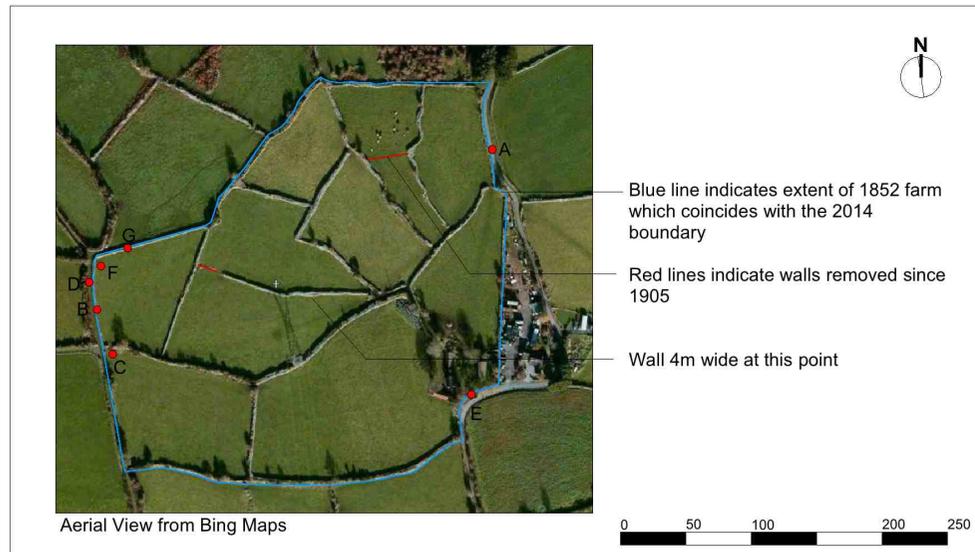
E - Decorative wall at entrance to farm house



F - Curved wall



G - Top of wall forming north boundary of farm



Blue line indicates extent of 1852 farm which coincides with the 2014 boundary

Red lines indicate walls removed since 1905

Wall 4m wide at this point

Figure 20 - Study Farm B 'Gahan'

The Future

'The Diversity of cultures and heritage in our world is an irreplaceable source of spiritual and intellectual richness for all humankind. The protection and enhancement of cultural and heritage diversity in our world should be actively promoted as an essential aspect of human development. (Nara Document Art. 5)'

While compiling this report, landowners in Dranagh were invited to complete a questionnaire to gather information about the general condition of the walls, the level of participation in agri-environmental schemes, and the capacity (time and skills) of landowners to maintain the walls. The questionnaire is included as an Appendix. Eleven farmers were interviewed, a random selection. It is thought that there are c. 24 farmers in Dranagh.

The responses to the questionnaire indicate that:-

- Granite 'ditches' needed repair in 91% of the farms
- 82% of farmers interviewed are over 55 and 45% are over 65
- 73% of farmers interviewed had stone wall building skills
- 64% of farmers interviewed farm part-time
- 27% of farmers interviewed are currently in an agri-environmental scheme
- 27% of farmers interviewed intend to apply for entry to GLAS, the new agri-environmental scheme
- 0% of the farmers interviewed currently receive a payment for stone wall maintenance
- 0% of the farmers are dairy or tillage farmers, 73% keep sheep, 64% suckler beef, 64% horses and 45% dry cattle.

During the interviews, the more elderly farmers pointed out that they had the skills to repair the walls but were no longer able to. Another farmer highlighted that in the past, 2-3 men would work on the farm and be available to repair walls. He now farmed the land part-time. The questionnaire responses illustrate that though farmers in Dranagh still have the stone wall building skills passed down through generations, that they need targeted support in order to maintain the walls.

Agri-environmental schemes like REPS and GLAS contain measures to maintain traditional rural landscape character and in particular stone wall repair, however the responses indicate that agri-environmental scheme measures will not reach enough farmers in Dranagh to be effective. The low level of participation in agri-environmental schemes is particularly surprising, given that the commonage in Dranagh is part of the Blackstairs Uplands Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Landowners who do enter GLAS can claim a uniform linear metre rate for stone wall maintenance. This uniform rate will not allow for the particular scale and complexity of maintaining the Dranagh walls.

It is clear from the questionnaire that targeted supports are required in order to maintain the walls in Dranagh. To identify what form these supports

might take, the management of other dry stone wall landscapes in the Burren (Irl.) and the Mournes (UK) was examined.

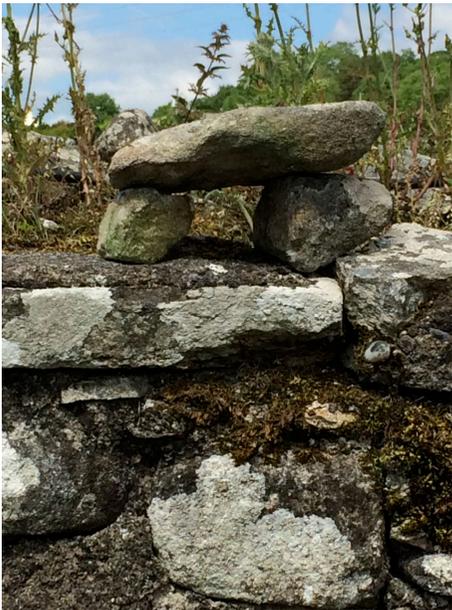
In the Mourne Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the Mourne Heritage Trust has a role to sustain and enhance the environment of the Mourne AONB. Generally farmers maintain the walls through UK agri-environmental schemes. If a wall is damaged as a result of recreational use, the Mourne Heritage Trust Ranger team, at times assisted by Countryside Officers, repair the walls. As an AONB, the trust can access funding from UK Heritage Lottery and the NI Rural Development Programme to employ contractors to repair longer sections of walls in prominent positions when required. Mourne Heritage Trust volunteers also contribute to wall repair and the trust organises and funds training in dry stone-walls repair for volunteers.

In the Burren, wall maintenance and repair are carried out in a number of ways depending on land ownership. In the Burren National Park, which is state owned, walls are typically repaired by the NPWS, sometimes with the assistance of Burren Conservation Volunteers. On farms, the farmer repairs the walls, or pays local stonemasons to do the work. Farmers who are part of The Burren Farming For Conservation Programme (BFCP) can access funds to maintain internal field walls within farms to improve targeted grazing by livestock. The Burren Farming For Conservation Programme also funds gates. Agri -environmental schemes such as REPS etc are focused on external farm boundary walls. Burrenbeo Trust which supports the sustainable management of the Burren landscape and heritage, supports a conservation volunteer group, Burren Conservation Volunteers. In addition to helping to control invasive species and scrub, three times a year the volunteers carry out wall repairs under the supervision of a stonemason. Burren Beo also arranges training for volunteers in wall building techniques.

The management of stone wall landscapes in the Mournes and the Burren share the following attributes - a landscape management body is in place; a landscape designation has been used to lever funding (National Park, SAC or AONB); and trained volunteers contribute to the maintenance of walls where necessary.

The Carlow County Development Plan 2015 -2021 is currently being developed and the draft Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) has been reviewed as part of this study. Of the townlands studied, the upland townlands of Dranagh, Knockroe and Crannagh are located in areas given a Landscape Sensitivity Rating of 5, the highest sensitivity. The lowland townlands of Ballynattin, Currane, Curranree, Ballinree and Ballinasillogue are located in areas given a Landscape Sensitivity Rating of 2-3, the lowest sensitivity for rural landscapes in the LCA. There is no guidance as to the landscape policy associated with this sensitivity rating in the Draft LCA. In the current 2009-2015 LCA the sensitivity rating of the townlands studied is broadly similar. Though Section 9.3.2 of the Draft Carlow County Development Plan recognises that 'stone walls make a significant contribution to our architectural heritage and that 'a lack of awareness of their inherent and associative value can result in the loss of these structures and subsequent erosion of heritage assets' it is unlikely that this clause or the LCA sensitivity rating could be used to lever funding in the way that the AONB designation does in the Mournes.

In Ireland, National Parks are state owned, so a National Park designation would be unsuited to the privately owned and farmed landscapes of The Blackstairs. Special Amenity Areas tend to be designated in areas like Howth, which are under significant development pressure. The National Landscape Strategy, published in draft form earlier this year did not include any new landscape designations. There appears to be a gap in Ireland's landscape policy for a landscape designation similar to the AONB designation used in the UK, and which can recognise our most beautiful and culturally significant landscapes.



Example of a box drain built by Dranagh farmer Patrick Byrne during fieldwork



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HNV Grassland

A community-led farming for conservation scheme, similar to the Burren Farming For Conservation Programme and designed to respond to the particular socio-economic conditions and the unique aspects of the landscape of The Blackstairs, could succeed in maintaining the stone wall landscapes of south Carlow. The Blackstairs Farming For Conservation Group formed in July this year could, in conjunction with a volunteer programme, become a vehicle for effective management of these important and culturally significant walls.

In early 2015, the report authors plan to host an event to share the contents of this study with the communities of The Blackstairs and to discuss with them and other stakeholders, the future of their unique and heritage-rich landscape.

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Appendix

GRANITE DRY STONE WALLS OF THE BLACKSTAIRS - DRANAGH CASE STUDY

Questionnaire

Stone Ditches/walls	Farmer 1	Farmer 2	Farmer 3	Farmer 4	Farmer 5	Farmer 6	Farmer 7	Farmer 8	Farmer 9	Farmer 10	Farmer 11	Total	%
Do you own farmland in The Townland of Dranagh?	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11	100%
Are there large stone ditches on your land - 'consumption walls'?	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11	100%
Are the stone dykes in need of repair in places?	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	10	91%
Do you have the skills to repair the walls yourself?	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	8	73%
Are there any features in the walls like geataís or styles?	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	5	45%
Feature type	geata	geata		geata				geata		geata			

Agri-Environmental Scheme

Do you have a herd number	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11	100%
Do you receive a payment from the Department of Agriculture to maintain the walls?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Are you in an agri-environmental scheme like REPS or AEOS?	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	27%
Do you intend to apply for GLAS?	-	-	-	1	0	-	1	1	0	-	0	3	27%
When were you last in an AE Scheme?	10y		Never		Never			1y		2y	3y		

Farmer Profile

What age category are you?													
	75+	1						1		1	1	4	36%
	65+		1									1	9%
	55-64				1	1	1		1			4	36%
	45-54	1										1	9%
	35-44			1								1	9%
	25-34											0	0%
	18-24											0	0%
Do you farm full time?	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	4	36%
Do you get the single farm payment?	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9	82%

Farm Type

What type of farming are you involved in?													
	Dairy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
	Beef (Dry cattle)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	5	45%
	Beef (Suckler and cattle)	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	7	64%
	Sheep	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	8	73%
	Tillage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
	Horses	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	7	64%
Do you make hay?	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	9	82%
Do you make silage?	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	8	73%
Do you reseed grassland?*	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	7	64%
Do you have Mountain Rights?	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	10	91%
Do you put stock on the commonage?	1	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	1	0	2	18%
Have you heard of High Nature Value Farming?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%

*Farmers who responded to this question often qualified their answers with 'not very often' or 'only when needed'

Yes	1
No	0
Don't know	-
No Answer	