

RÉAMHFHOCAL

The English language version of most placenames in Ireland, with the exception of some original English names (e.g. Emyvale, Littleton and Newlands) and Norse names (e.g. Howth, Waterford, Leixlip), are almost all transliterations of the original name in the Irish language.

In the Irish language it is usually the first part of the name that tells us the physical feature that describes the place. Among the more common examples are:

Dun:	Dún:	<i>Fort</i>
Ard:	Ard:	<i>Hill/ High Ground/Height</i>
Bally:	Baile:	<i>Town</i>
Knock:	Cnoc:	<i>Hill</i>
Clon:	Cluain:	<i>Meadow</i>
Ath:	Áth:	<i>Ford</i>
Slieve	Sliabh:	<i>Mountain</i>
Kill :	Cill:	<i>Chapel/ Graveyard</i>
Rath:	Ráth:	<i>Ring-fort</i>
Moy:	Maigh:	<i>Plain</i>
Cloon:	Cluain:	<i>Meadow</i>
Tipper:	Tobar	<i>Well</i>
Caher:	Cathair:	<i>Habitation/City (in modern parlance)</i>
Avon:	Abhainn:	<i>River</i>
Agha:	Achadh:	<i>Field</i>
Carrig:	Carraig:	<i>Rock</i>

The second part of placenames often contains the name of a person after whom the place was named. This person might be one of the old Irish saints or a local chieftain. Alternatively the second part of the name might be an adjective (e.g. Ráth Mór: the big ring-fort) or a second noun in the genitive case (Carraig na bhFear: The Rock of the Men).

The Irish version of the names contained in this listing were taken from the listing of The Placenames Branch (Brainse na Logainmneacha) which came under the aegis of the Department for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht in recent years. Its research is available online – www.logainm.ie. [Unfortunately the Government has now abolished the Placenames Branch and it is envisaged that its work will be carried out by a voluntary committee, An Coiste Logainmneacha, whose work would be conducted on a *pro bono* basis and mostly online].

Some people may say, on seeing this listing, “Oh, but that it not what I heard at school when I was young”. And they may indeed be right. Different versions of placenames appear in writings from different periods in history in both Irish and English. The main source of such information on Irish versions for many decades was a series of booklets called *Postsheanchas*, listings of postal placenames, compiled for the Gaelic League in the early years of the 20th century by Seosamh Laoide. While some may dispute certain official placenames it is evident to most people regard the work of the Placenames Branch as being the most reliable source of information and furthermore has the advantage of being ‘official’.

The English language ‘explanations’ in this document should be treated with the utmost caution. In many cases they are no more than educated guesses. Some of the meanings are unclear and research by local people familiar with the history and topography of the parish would be most welcome.

When the Irish language went into steep decline, mostly in the 19th century, a layer of incomprehension covered the richness and meaningfulness of our toponymy. This listing is a modest attempt to reveal some of those after whom the Parishes of the Church of Ireland were named. Rather than being a definitive listing it should be regarded as a first step.

Dónall Ó Riagáin

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