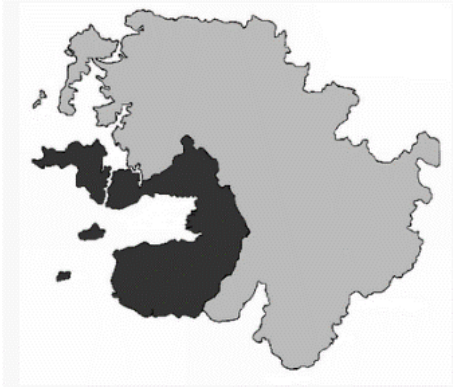


O'Malleys in Doogort, Achill

by

Brendan O'Malley



Umhall (dark Colour) in Co Mayo

There are relatively few O'Malleys today who can claim to be directly descended from the Princes of Umhall (anglicised as the Owles) in Co Mayo. O'Malley genealogies go back to Brian Orbison, son of the High King of Ireland, who died in the year 365, according to the ancient annals. Brian's descendants were the Princes of Umhall and the ancient genealogies trace his descendants through the generations to modern times.

One of these O'Malley lines of descent takes us to the island of Achill, where the village of Doogort lies on the northern coast, just at the eastern foot of Slievemore mountain. I was given a family tree by Annette O'Malley of Achill, who had

been given it by a cousin. They are not sure exactly which member of the family originally compiled it. The modern day O'Malleys in that line include Annette herself as well as Michael O'Malley who once ran the Post Office in Keel, Achill and his son Kieran, founder of the Achill Sea Salt business. Others emigrated to Cleveland, Ohio in the USA and to Queensland in Australia.

Their family tree goes back to Dermot O'Malley, who was Lord of the Owles in 1414. It shows Owen Dubhdara O'Malley, father of the famous Grace O'Malley, known as Granuaile, as Dermot's great great grandson. Other genealogies agree with that relationship, but there are several differing versions of the generations in between. The tree also shows Melaghlin O'Malley (Chieftain between 1579 and 1586) as the son of Owen Dudhdara (Chieftain between 1549 and 1579) and father to Edmond, regarded as the last gaelic chieftain of the O'Malleys, who died in 1651. This version of the sixteenth century part of the tree was promulgated by Dr Austin O'Malley of Philadelphia in the late 19th century but is now generally held to be wrong. Owen Dubhdara, Melaghlin and Edmond all definitely existed and were all Chieftains of the Clan, but it is more likely that they were cousins rather than grandfather, father, and son as shown in the tree. Edmond's father was in fact Owen of Cahernamart, Chieftain between 1586 and sometime after 1607. While the earlier part of the tree, like many others, may not be historically reliable, the later parts can be taken to be more accurate. Edmond O'Malley, last Chieftain of the Clan, was born in 1579 and had three sons: Captain Thomas O'Malley who fought with Owen Roe O'Neill, Cormac (or Charles) O'Malley, ancestor of the Belclare line and Captain Edmond O'Malley who joined the Spanish army. These three brothers are shown in other accounts, as are their descendants. The line continues from Captain Thomas to his son William of Caher, born in 1635 (or Caheer as it is spelt here) and then to William's son Teige of Achill, born around 1665. Teige married Mary MacSweeney of Co Donegal around 1687 and they had three sons: Edmond, Owen and Charles. Edmond was the ancestor of Dr Austin and the Philadelphia line as well as of the Ross House O'Malleys, while Owen, born around 1695, was the ancestor of the Doogort line of O'Malleys. Owen was the first of seven generations of Owen O'Malleys in direct descent, which makes it difficult to know exactly which one is the subject of subsequent leases and other records!

Achill island is part of the barony of Burrishoole, which is the northern half of the original O'Malley territory of the Owles, surrounding Clew Bay in Co Mayo (see map). Following the 12th century Norman conquest, Richard Mór de Burgh was made Lord of Connacht and overlord to the O'Malleys and others

in the region. By the fifteenth century, the Mac William Íochtar (the Mayo Bourkes) controlled most of Mayo but were in turn supplanted by the Butlers, Dukes of Ormond. Sometime in the late seventeenth century, the Burrishoole estate of some 70,000 acres was acquired by Thomas Medlycott, Chief Commissioner of Revenue in Ireland, from Charles Butler, Earl of Arran, and grandson of the 1st Duke of Ormond. Later on in the 18th century the Medlycotts found themselves in financial difficulties and in 1774 sold the estate to John Browne, 1st Earl of Altamont who sold it back to the Medlycotts on a lease in perpetuity. This lease was in turn sold by the Medlycotts to Sir Neal O'Donel¹ in 1785. Despite the changes in ultimate ownership, many O'Malleys still lived in Burrishoole, albeit on the basis of leases and/or sub leases from the new owners.



Doogort and Slievemore in Achill

The Registry of Deeds in Dublin contains the details of a lease dated 1st August 1761 of land in “Daogart, Arddlene and Dirk” from Thomas John Medlycott to “Owen O Malley of Dogurt in the County of Mayo Gent” for a period of 31 years. The same lease is referred to in the O'Donnell estate papers in the National Library as the “Farm of Doogart, Ardeloon and Dirk”. So much for spelling! Under the penal laws of the time, no Catholic was allowed to lease land for more than 31 years. This was in all probability the same Owen, now 66 years old, who was the

son of Teige of Achill, although it could possibly have been his son, also called Owen, born around 1720, so then aged 41. The Medlycott in the deed may have been the son of the original Thomas.

The lease refers to the land having the same “bounds and mearing as he now holds”, indicating that this was a renewal of a previous lease, but not telling us much about the property itself. A letter to Captain Tyrrell O'Malley of Ross House in 1946 from a P Moran of Mulranny, a local historian, says that he had seen a reference to an area called Caher near Slievemore and that Dirk “lies on the north west slope of Slievemore, stretching to the sea.” He did not know anything, however, about Arddlene. Nonetheless, the property appears to have covered an area stretching from Doogort village in the east around the southern slopes of the mountain of Slievemore to the north west slope. If that was the case, then the O'Malleys must have been a lead tenant in the area, subleasing in turn to the many pre-famine residents.

Thirty years later the estate records of Sir Neal O'Donel in the Irish National Archives record a lease dated 16th November 1691 of land on Doogort to Owen and Patrick O'Malley, presumably the sons or grandsons of the first Owen. The third Owen was born around 1755 so would have been aged 36 in 1691, while his father, if still alive, would have been 71.

Confirming the O'Malley status as lead tenant, that the estate records show only one lease in the Doogort and Slievemore area. Similarly, there is only one lease recorded in each of the principal areas of Achill. It is also significant that the 1761 lease describes Owen O'Malley as a Gentleman, which indicated that he was considered to be a member of the gentry – people who did not need to work for a living and so were a step above farmers in the social hierarchy of the time.

¹Historical spelling of names is always a matter of contention. Sir Neal spelled his name with one n and one l, but his son, Sir Richard seems to have used two ns and two ls in at least some cases. The O'Malleys are another case in point. Most of the time they would have used the Irish Máille, which was anglicised variously as Malley (in Clare Island records) or Melia (in Achill records) or O'Malley.

The 1791 lease was for the duration of the lives of the two O'Malley lessees, Owen and Patrick, a common practice at the time, which facilitated the extension of leases by the addition of further lives later on. The 31 year leasehold restriction on Catholics had been repealed, so was no longer necessary.

In 1830, an outbreak of famine and cholera swept the west coast of Ireland, being particularly severe in Mayo. The following year the Reverend Edward Nangle², investigating conditions along the Mayo coast, visited Achill and, moved by the destitution of the people, resolved to set up a mission to help them. Sir Richard O'Donnell provided land at Dugort on a long lease with a nominal rent and he and Nangle became friends. Like Nangle, O'Donnell had developed a fierce dislike to all things Catholic, so a central objective of the Achill Mission was the conversion of Catholics to the Protestant religion.

Nangle was interested in renting a further 130 acres that was already being farmed at Faiche on the eastern end of Slievemore village. Owen O Malley is listed in the 1828 Tithe Applotment Book as holding a total of 785 acres between Slievemore and "Doogurth" of which 72 acres were arable, 63 were pasture and the rest is described as bog and mountain. Eight others also held property in these townlands. It is not possible to identify the specific properties that each held, but certainly Nangle's ambitions affected them all. Despite the objections of O'Malley and the other tenants, Nangle was successful in acquiring these lands in 1831 in the name of Achill Mission Estate. The O'Donnell estate records confirm that the O'Malley lease was sold to the Achill Mission and as a result the O'Malleys became tenants of the Mission. In the family tree, four generations (born between 1720 and 1825) are referred to as being from Fahy's Plains, presumably an anglicisation of the Irish Faiche. It was in this village of Faiche or Dugort West as it was renamed, that the first school in Achill was built by the Achill Mission, the ruins of which are still visible. Little else remains of Faiche, while the central and western parts of Slievemore village survive, though unoccupied, and are known as The Deserted Village.

Further sales by the O'Donnell estate took place in subsequent years and the Achill Mission controlled most of the island by the end of the decade. The Mission took an active role in managing their land, setting up schools, a corn mill, a church and an orphanage and were very active in converting poor Catholic families to Protestantism. It is said locally that the inhabitants of Faiche who held on to their Catholic religion were evicted to make way for sheep.

Griffith's valuation, taken in the 1850s, shows a house in Slievemore and landholdings in Doogort West and Doogort East, all leased by an Owen Melia³ from the Achill Mission. It is unclear exactly what happened to the family landholdings subsequently. The sixth Owen O'Malley, born in 1857, moved away from Doogort and Slievemore. He is referred to as Owen of Keel, a larger village nearer the sea on the south coast of Achill. He was Annette O'Malley's great grandfather. He died in 1943 and is buried in the cemetery at Slievemore with his wife Margaret and two sisters. Some of his descendants still own property in the Deserted Village.

The records show other O'Malleys living in various parts of Achill in the late eighteenth and through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but this particular line is the only one that I am aware of that has a specific claim of descent from the well-documented chieftains of the fifteen and sixteenth centuries.

² I am indebted to the Achill Heritage Centre's excellent "Sharing our Stories" and to an article in it by Vincent English for information on the Achill Mission

³ The spelling of the O'Malley name is another case of historical variation. Most of the time they would have used the Irish Máille, which was anglicised variously as Malley (in Clare Island records) or Melia (in Achill records) or O'Malley.