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The South Kilkenny Farm Villages

Jack Burtchaell

The rural settlement pattern of Ireland is now predominantly dispersed in nature. The pervasive influence of cattle and the pastoral nature of the rural economy has long been recognised as the major force shaping this pattern. However, nucleated and agglomerated rural settlements are a minor but significant feature of Irish settlement geography. Their existence and importance has long been recognised by historical geographers,[1] particularly those of the Ulster school inspired by E. Estyn Evans.[2] The central question addressed in this chapter is why the farm villages of South Kilkenny have survived intact into the late twentieth century.

The baronies of Ida and Iverk are the two southernmost baronies in Co. Kilkenny. They form a distinctive regional unit, their boundaries being clearly defined by the Walsh and Brandon mountains to the north (Fig. 6.1). These sandstone and granite uplands cut Ida and Iverk off from the rolling central plain of Co. Kilkenny. They form a northern barrier which has served to isolate south Kilkenny from the rest of the county. The other borders of Ida and Iverk are clearly demarcated by the wide tidal expanses of the lower reaches of the Barrow and Suir. Ida-Iverk is, therefore, that part of Kilkenny with access to tidal water. The soils of the region are acid brown earths, derived from sandstone and limestone glacial till in Iverk and of Ordovician and Silurian origins in Ida. These soils are, for the most part, deep, friable and fertile.

Ida and Iverk are fringed by large, solid and ancient market towns, though no such town is actually sited within the two baronies. To the west lies Carrick-on-Suir in neighbouring Co. Tipperary. Eastwards is the town of New Ross, fulcrum of the Barrow valley and an important port. To the north-east nestles Graiguenamanagh on a meander of the Barrow. Across the Suir, Waterford city is the urban focus of the entire south-east of Ireland. A bustling port, it was at one time considered to be the second city of Ireland.[3] Thus, Ida and Iverk are rural expanses but in no way remote. This area has throughout history been in intimate contact with sophisticated urban markets and has long been part of an integrated regional economy.

All these factors have nurtured a society of wealth, comfort and permanence untypical of Ireland as a whole. This degree of prosperity has helped propagate a conservatism more enduring than that of less physically favoured areas elsewhere. The self-confidence and stability of Ida and Iverk has meant that change is accepted only slowly and after

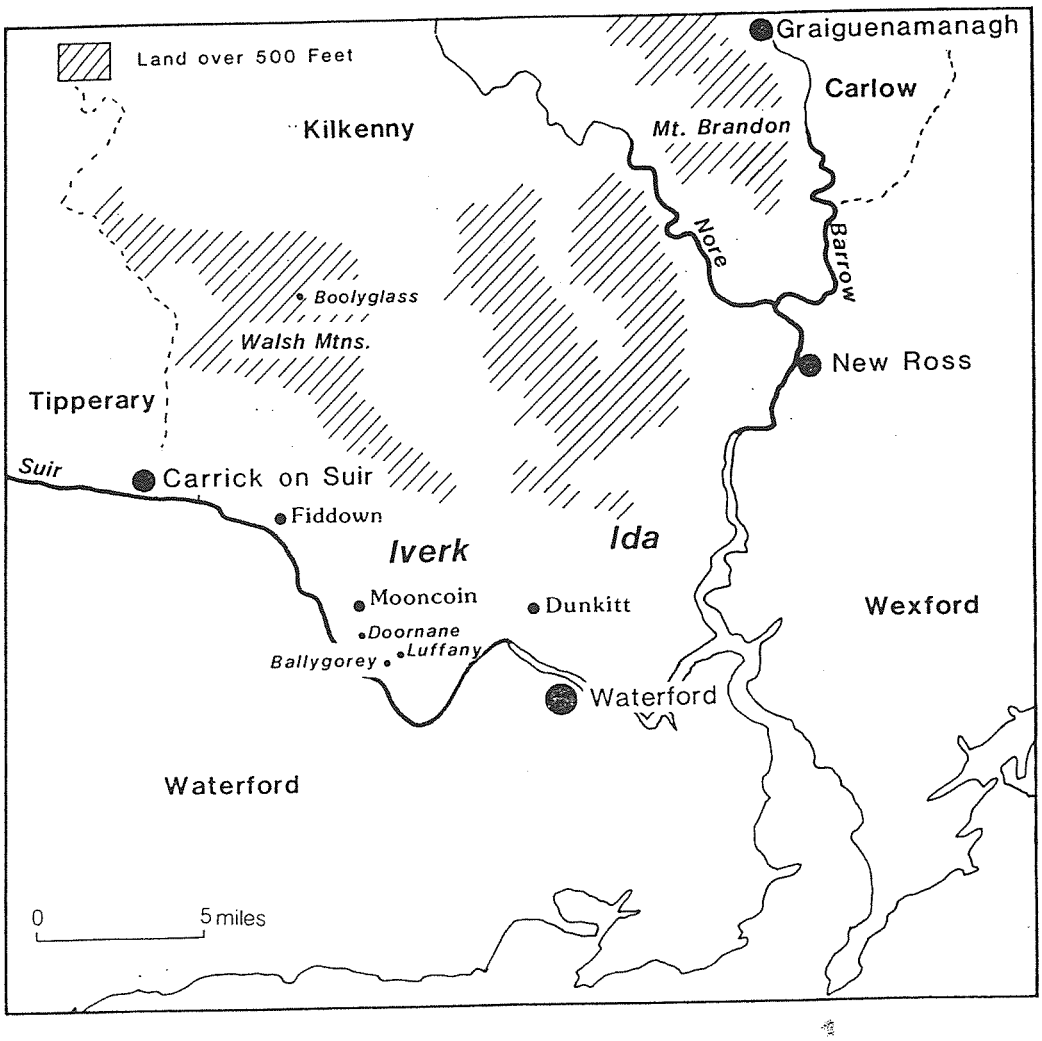

Fig. 6.1. Study-area south Kilkenny

due consideration. A central theme of this paper is that it is in the wealthy and stable areas of south and east Ireland that we must probe for some of the deeper roots of Irish settlement. In south Kilkenny and especially in the parish of Mooncoin, survivals of nucleated and clustered settlements remain intact. This paper will argue that many of these still functioning clusters of farmsteads (farm villages) appear to be medieval in age, some may be pre-Norman in origin and others, while later, appear to be feudal in inspiration.

A charter of 1239 refers to Licketstown, Clonmore, Portnascully and specifies a *ville* and chapel at Ullid.[4] In 1314, an extent of the rents and services of the free tenants of the barony of Iverk names several farm villages as places of residence.[5] Dunkitt, Rathcurby,

Portnahully, Corluddy, Owning, Ullid, Portnascully, Dungooly, Kilmacow, Ballygorey and Ballytarsney are all mentioned. The bones of the settlement structure certainly seem to be in place by this early date.

Of the fifty-seven farm villages identified in the south Kilkenny baronies of Ida and Iverk, eight contain medieval civil parish centres: Aglish, Arderra, Ballytarsney, Clonmore, Portnascully, Ullid, Weatherstown and Kilmakevoge. Two more, Pollrone and Rathinure, have parish centres within the townland, though not within the farm village. A further five farm villages — Kilcraggan, Killinaspick, Listrolin, Davidstown and Rochestown — contained a medieval church, while Ballygorey reputedly contained an ancient place of worship.[6] Thirteen of the farm villages contained a castle or tower house either within their confines or immediately adjacent. Portnascully has an accompanying motte. Other features present in these farm villages which would suggest an early genesis include raths, holy wells, and medieval mills such as those at Portnascully and Clonmore.[7] Pollrone was the site of a medieval baronial court.[8] The mid seventeenth century Down Survey maps show a coherent pattern of defensive and ecclesiastical functions associated with many of the farm villages of South Kilkenny. Only seventeen of the fifty-seven farm villages do not have an obvious medieval feature, though this alone does not rule them out as genuine farm villages, originating in that period.

In appearance, these villages may differ quite substantially. Morphologically, they fall into four typological groups (Plates 6.1 to 6.4). This classification is not cast iron and certain villages combine features of at least two categories. Firstly, there are the farm villages which are linear and regular, often aligned on one side of a straight road. Lufany is the type site. This group is numerous and other examples include Moonveen, Glengrant, Ballykillaboy, Curraghmartin, Ballytarsney and both Ballyfasy farm villages. In the second group, village form is apparently dictated by location at a focus of routeways. Many of these farm villages are centrally located in the townland, frequently to the exclusion of all other dwellings. Doornane is the type site but this numerous category includes many other fine examples including Portnahully, Portnascully, Licketstown, Grange, Bearstown, Ballincrea, Tinnaranny and Rochestown.

Farm villages that consist of a line of almost adjoining haggards and courtyard farms make up the third grouping. In plan, they coil like a pearl necklace along a road. These are less common than the previous two categories. Ballygorey is the finest example but other instances include Davidstown, Listrolin, Killinaspick and Carranroe.

Finally, there are those farm villages which are focused on a green or commonage. These settlements may be sub-triangular in plan, the courtyard farmsteads lining two sides of a green and bounded on the other side by a stream. Alternatively, they may be less regular in layout with a scattering of farmsteads around a central common. Boolyglass in Knocktopher barony illustrates the former while Weatherstown typifies the latter. These Boolyglass-type farm villages are the least numerous and reveal a peripheral distribution along the upland area. In these settlements, commercial darying rather than intensive tillage has long been the economic mainstay. Examples include Baunskeha, Killahy, Rahillakeen, Ballyhomuck and Weatherstown.

Political, social and economic stability are some of the key factors which have insured the survival of these settlements until the present day. Other pivotal areas in the medieval economy of Ireland, especially those regions geared to intensive cereal

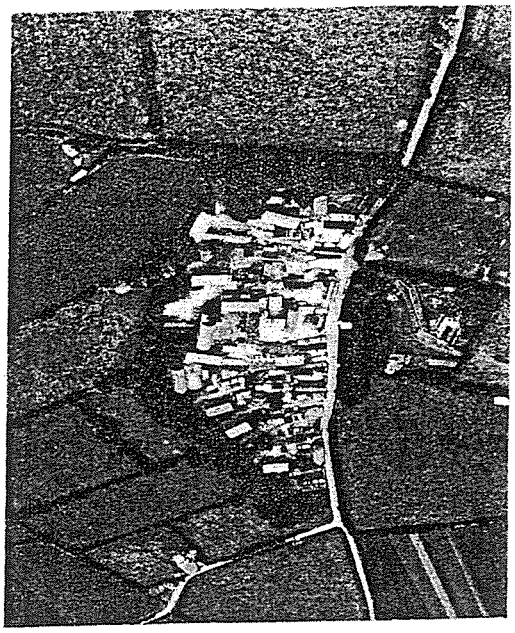

Plate 6.1. Type I Village: Luffany (St. Joseph Cambridge University Collection)

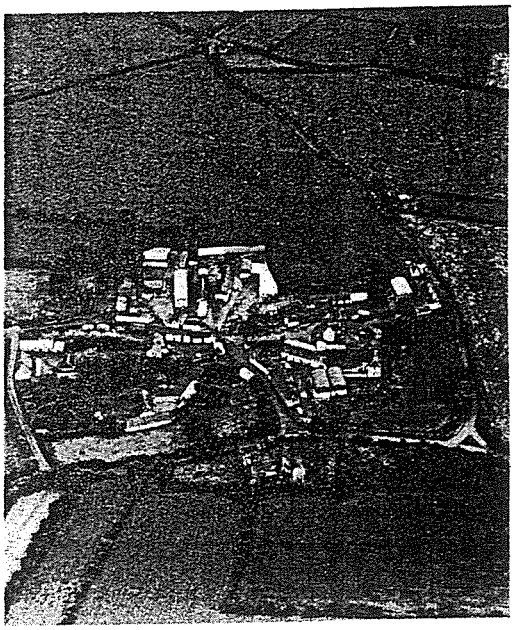

Plate 6.2. Type II Village: Doornane (St. Joseph: Cambridge University Collection)

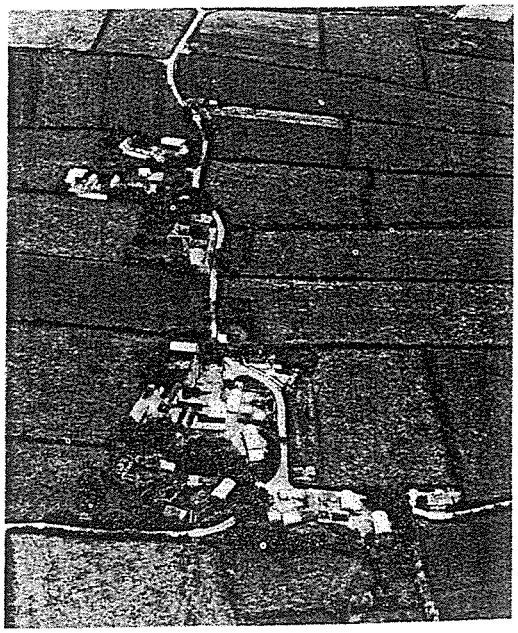

Plate 6.3. Type III Village: Ballygorey (St. Joseph: Cambridge University Collection)

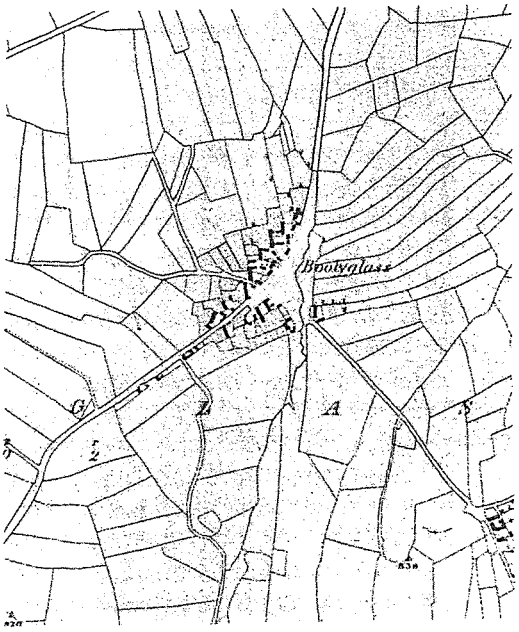

Plate 6.4. Type IV Village: Boolyglass (First ed., O.S. Sheet No. 35)

production, were probably once dominated by this European type settlement structure.[9] The heavily Normanised areas of south Tipperary, mid Kilkenny, south Wexford, Carlow and the Pale region which had settlements of this type were rapidly losing them in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.[10] Instability in either economic and land-use structures or in landowning and political hierarchies accelerated this process. The reason for the survival of these features in south Kilkenny and only sporadically elsewhere is the high degree of stability which pertained in the lower reaches of the Suir, Nore and Barrow. This key area was stable in political, economic, social and demographic terms throughout the crucial seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While there was change, it operated within the existing frameworks; it did not shatter, bypass or replace them.

Political stability was insured by the overlordship of the Ordmonde Butlers, spanning the centuries from 1319 onwards to emerge unbroken and virtually unscathed in the maelstrom of the seventeenth century. Much of the land of the area remained in Ormonde hands until the first decades of the eighteenth century. Most of the parishes of Kilmacow and Mooncoin and significant portions of Whitechurch and Tullagher were owned by the dukes of Ormonde, while major parts of Glenmore and Rosbercon were held by other minor Butlers. The Mountgarretts, another Butler line, held sway over parts of the Rower in the mid seventeenth century.[11] Clogga and Cashelfarrell were not alienated from the Ormonde paternity until 1698;[12] Pollrone remained until 1694.[13] Ballytarsney was not leased for lives renewable until the Earl of Arran let it to John Wodehouse of Northhampton in 1736.[14] The Earl of Arran sold off Garranbehy, Ballycommon, Carranroe, Garranvabby, Ballynunry and Lennaght in the Rower to John Agar in 1722.[15] Garranbehy was immediately relet to John Butler, a Wexford merchant.[16] This was the characteristic pattern of subletting. South Kilkenny, apart from localised exceptions at Fiddown and Dunkitt, did not experience systematic colonial immigration in the seventeenth century. The powerful shield of the Ormonde Butlers deflected Cromwellian settlers into parts of neighbouring counties such as north Wexford. This protective shield safeguarded south Kilkenny during the era of the most fundamental change in landowning and rural settlement that this island has experienced. The Ormondes, whilst ostensibly serving 'English interests', diverted English settlers from this hearthland of their fiefdom. By the time the Ormonde estates disintegrated in the two decades before the duke's attainder in 1714, it was too late for intensive settler immigration. The expanding horizons of the English worldview envisaged America not Kilkenny as central to their overseas settlement schemes. Radical change in settlement and social structure, while widespread in the chaotic years of the mid seventeenth century, were by this later stage increasingly confined to marginal locations or to areas of newly exploitable resources such as the Castlecomer plateau in north Kilkenny.[17] The lack of colonial penetration is illustrated by the 1766 returns of the numbers of Catholic and Protestant families.[18] South Kilkenny clearly stands out as an area of very little immigration (Table 6.1).

The overall landowning stability of the south of the county was reinforced by a series of minor gentry families whose local importance was considerable. This aristocracy were the descendants of the sub-infeudated barons of the medieval era. They were dominantly Norman in name and exclusively Catholic in culture. The Neales of Mountneill, Forstalls of Rochestown, Aylwards of Aylwardstown, Grants of Corluddy,

TABLE 6.1

PERCENTAGE PROTESTANT BY CIVIL PARISHES: BARONIES OF IDA AND IVERK 1766

Rossinan	0.0%	Rathkeiran	3.9%
Kilcoan	0.0%	Clonamery	4.3%
Kilbride	0.0%	Rower	5.8%
Portnascully	0.7%	Shanbogh	6.3%
Dysertmoon	1.5%	Clonmore	6.9%
Polerone and Ullid	1.9%	Gaulskill	7.4%
Listerlin	2.0%	Rathpatrick	10.0%
Kilmakevoge	2.2%	Dunkitt	12.3%
Ballytarsney	2.4%	Rosbercon	12.6%
Kilmacow	3.0%	Kilculliheen	13.0%
Kilcolumb	3.4%	Fiddown	29.5%
Ballygurrim	3.7%		

Source: Carrigan (1905), iv, pp 404-8

Dens of Dunkitt, Walshs of the Mountain, and Fitzgeralds of Gorteens and Brownsford were the local Ormonde dependent landholders. They held some land in fee but mostly leased for terms of lives. Some of the more marginal of these families were removed by the Cromwellians but most recovered by the Act of Settlement. The landholding structure this system engendered thus weathered the storm of the seventeenth century. The survival of Catholic proprietors and middlemen was vital; they provided the anchor points around which the local society revolved. On the townland scale these families were as crucial as were the Ormondes on the broader regional canvas. The combination of penal laws, movement into trade, selective emigration and financial mismanagement dissipated these familial estates in the early eighteenth century. The Forstalls sold off their outlying townlands of Gurteens and Kilmurry in 1714.[19] The Neales sold their townlands of Cussana, Licketstown, Moonveen and Mountneill in 1763, in the absence of a male heir. The Aylwards and Forstalls remained in possession in their core areas in Glenmore throughout the eighteenth century through a variety of devices. Nicholas Aylward lost the ancestral estate of Knockduff, Aylwardstown, Robinstown, Ballinraha and Haggard under Cromwell. Displaced to Galway, his son Piers married back into Shankill, Co. Kilkenny, his grandson Nicholas officially conformed to Protestantism in 1711 and was by 1726 leasing the old estate from Viscount Duncannon.[20] It is in precisely this area (the civil parishes of Kilcolumb, Kilmakevoge, and Ballygurrim) that the finest surviving farm villages in the barony of Ida are found.

As the remnants of the medieval gentry dissolved in the eighteenth century, new forces impinged on the south Kilkenny landscape. Prosperous mercantile families whose wealth and power base were in the adjacent towns of Waterford, New Ross, and Carrick-on-Suir invested in land for a variety of reasons. Land was the most secure and

sought after collateral for borrowing. Investment in the leaseholding market provided a secure method of banking profits gained in trade. Political power and social prestige were also enhanced by holding land. Many successful eighteenth century merchants measured their achievments in business by the fact that they no longer needed to actively participate in trade. They sought to merge and marry into the landowning elite.

Anthony Clifford, the Waterford merchant, leased Moonveen in 1746.[21] Alexander Boyd of Waterford dabbled in land leasing throughout the 1720s. The 1813 will of Robert Backas, also a Waterford merchant, indicates that he had leasehold interests in Portnascully, Corluddy, Portnahully and Dungooly.[22] Simon Newport, another Waterford merchant, in his will of the same year referred to interests in Bishopshall, Ballykillaboy, Carrickcloney, Farnoge and Rathard.[23] Thus much of south Kilkenny was held by merchants whose primary economic concerns were elsewhere. Townlands were leased for a few years until the merchant needed to raise cash, then he sold his interest in the lease to another merchant who had surplus cash. This rapid change in landownership was not conducive to the sustained management of properties of the 'improving' kind, a characteristic of the landed gentry elsewhere in Ireland in this period. Nor were merchants likely to interfere in local social and settlement structures. Their agents collected rent from 'headmen' and the other townland inhabitants, designated 'partners', had little contact or interaction with the agent or merchants. Such short term speculations did not inspire any other interest in the townlands concerned other than the collection of rent.

South Kilkenny by and large was not an estate landscape. It is interesting to note that the highest expression of landlord intrusion, the demesne, is noticeable by its absence in the main village area. The distribution of demesne lands and farm villages in Kilkenny as a whole are mutually exclusive. Demesnes decorate the pastures of north Kilkenny especially in the barony of Galmoy where farm villages are absent. The farm village landscapes of south Kilkenny lay outside the reconstructed worlds of gentry living.

Prosperity and durability are the distinguishing features of the agricultural economy of the area throughout modern history. Its rich sun-drenched lime-laden clays have been riven by the plough and cropped by the sickle for close on a millenium. Since Norman-times and possibly before, cereal production was central here in this, the breadbasket of Waterford city. Cattle were confined to the riverine watermeadows and the flanking Walsh mountains. Enclosure was late and incomplete even by 1800, when perhaps 45 per cent of lowland Iverk was under the plough.[24] Throughout Europe in such tillage dominated rural economies, settlement agglomeration and openfields were the norm. Only a mixed pastoral and tillage economy demands enclosure, a process which increased rapidly in this area after 1770 with the rise of commercial butter production for the burgeoning provisions trade to England, Newfoundland and elsewhere.[25] In the farm village area of lowland Mooncoin, manure was at such a premium due to the demands of tillage and the lack of cattle that farmers here bid for the right to scrape the dung off the streets of Waterford city five miles away. Intensive potato cultivation as a fodder crop for pig fattening was an integral part of the economy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The continuous centrality of tillage in the rural economy would have hindered the dispersion of settlement. The scattered parcels of land that made up each farm would also have tended to keep farmers in the central location of the

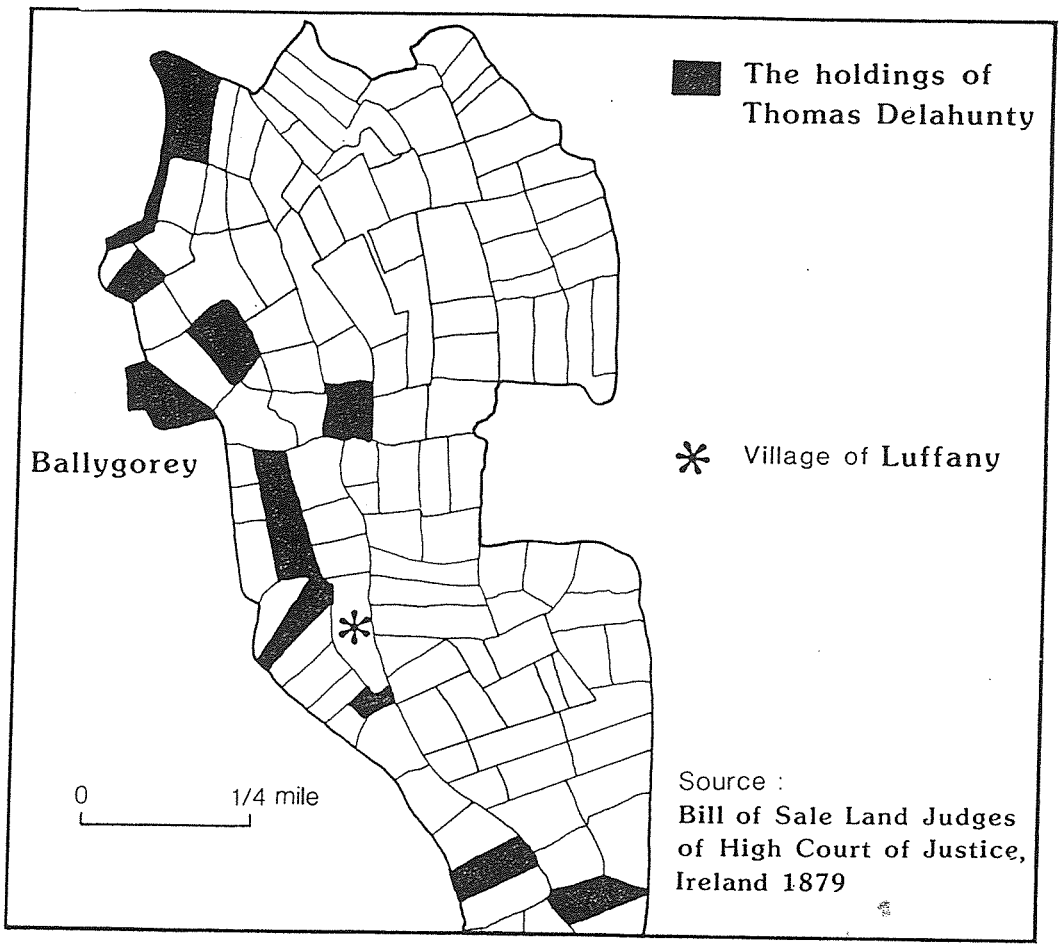

Fig. 6.2. The holdings of Thomas Delahunty in the townland of Luffany 1879

farm village. A map showing Thomas Delahunty's land in Luffany illustrates this (Fig. 6.2).

The degree of stability engendered by the above mentioned factors is apparent in the table of family continuity for the village of Licketstown (Table 6.2). The two outstanding features illustrated in Table 6.2 are the continuity of families across two centuries of history and the obvious stratification of society here in 1675. This social stratification was virtually undisturbed between 1675 and 1850.

It is not surprising that the Irish language endured longer here in the sheltered estuarine valleys of the three sisters than anywhere else in south Leinster. Native speakers survived in the parishes of Glenmore and Tullagher until the mid twentieth century. Irish was still the vernacular in the post-Famine generation. The bardic tradition of poetry patronised by local gentry lingered on here and is best exemplified by

Sean Mac Bhaitéir Walsh (1580-1660). John O'Donovan (1809-1861) the 'great Irish scholar and topographer'[29] was a son of Ida. Amhlaoibh Ó Súilleabháin, whose famous diary *Cin Lae Amhlaoibh* portrays an Irish-speaking middle class in the south Kilkenny of the 1820s and 1830s was not atypical; he would have been representative of his milieu and region.

South Kilkenny has also been one of the hearthlands of Irish Catholicism over the past three centuries. The religious facets of the penal laws were ineffective in this area. A vibrant, coherent and well managed Catholic parochial structure operated here since at least 1700. The area is remarkable for its early Catholic chapels.[30] Templeorum originated 'as far back as the days of Queen Elizabeth'.[31] Mooncoin chapel dates to the seventeenth century, Glenmore Chapel was built circa 1700 as was Clodiagh chapel.[32] The advanced organisation of the Catholic church in the area is reflected in the very early date of Catholic parish registers, Slieverue dating from 1766 and Mooncoin commencing in 1772. These dates are very early for rural parishes. Expression of this deep seated Catholicism is also seen in the recruitment of clergy. The area has responded generously to the manpower needs of its church. Mooncoin parisn produced more clergy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than any other Ossory parish.[33] This achievement, in one of the most monolithically Catholic of Irish dioceses, is significant.

The strength of these two central cultural features — language and religion — illustrates a culture not only inimical to radical change but revealing a self-assurance and durability in the face of altering circumstances. The area preserved in the eighteenth century many aspects of an older medieval way of life. This area was, and still is, a hearthland of the game of hurling; a county medal and a place on the hurling team conveys a status and prestige hardly comprehensible to the outsider. The game thrives on intense localism and pride in hearth, heritage and history: 'We gave the hurling long before the G.A.A. was ever heard of an' they'll still be talking of the Mooncoin hurlers when the nations are lining out for Gabriel's last trumpet call'.[34] Hurling especially expresses old feudal animosities and alliances. On 11 August 1765, a tumultuous assembly of several thousand met near Rathkieran for a hurling match; it led to fear that it would upset public tranquility.[35]

Other archaic practices were common in this society throughout the eighteenth century. The practice of abducting heiresses was especially common here and in Kilkenny generally, compared to the more anglicised counties of Laois, Wexford and Carlow. This practice receded rapidly following the execution of Garrett Byrne, Patrick and James Strange for the abduction of the Kennedy sisters in Graiguenamanagh in 1780. In a society where social advancement was difficult and marriage was one of the few social escalators, the only daughters of large farmers and middlemen were perceived as a very valuble commodity. Matchmaking was one of the devices used to preserve the social and economic status quo. This pressurised the downwardly socially mobile into these illegal activities. Once a girl had been abducted, her image, and thereby her marriage potential, was tainted so the abductor enhanced his prospects of parental approval as a son-in-law. Margaret Deady of Doornane was the victim of an abduction in August 1776,[36] as was the daughter of John Dalton of Tibberaghney in 1772.[37] How much the women in question connived in their abductions to avoid unwelcome matches is impossible to say. However, connivance on the part of young women was certainly a factor on occasions.

TABLE 6.2

FAMILY CONTINUITY IN THE VILLAGE OF LICKETSTOWN 1675-1850

1675	*Rents*	*1821*	*Acreage*	*1850*	*Valuation*
John Walsh	£5.10.0	Richard Walsh	36a		
James Grant	£5. 8.0	John Grant	20a	Richard Grant	£46.00
William Brennan	£4. 0.0	Stephen Brennan	20a	Philip Brennan	£48.00
Edmund Brennan	£3. 5.0	John Brennan	20a	John Brennan	£46.00
John Walsh Fitzrobert	£3. 0.0	Walter Walsh	18a		
Daniel Phelan	£2.18.0	Patrick Phelan	16a	Patrick Phelan	£30.00
		Mattias Phelan		Mattias Phelan	£20.10
James McEmmerine	£2.10.0				
Philip Walsh	£2. 6.0	John Walsh	12a	Margaret Walsh	£21.10
James Leahy	£2.50.0				
Catherine Nyhue	£2.30.0				
Walter Walsh	£2. 0.0	Richard Walsh	10a		
Richard Brennan	£1.16.0	Patrick Brennan	20a	Edmund Brennan	£26.10
				William Brennan	£ 0.12
William O Bow	£1.14.0				
John Grant	£1.12.0				
Walter Grant	£1.10.0				
John Brennan	£1.10.0	John Brennan	20a	Philip Brennan	£23.00
Nicholas Henneberry	£1. 7.0				
John Walsh (weaver)	£1. 6.0	Michael Walsh (weaver)		Richard Walsh	£ 0.10
Nicholas Walsh	£0.15.0	Mary Walsh Walsh	10a		

Sources: 1675 Will of William Walsh, Ossory Will Book;[26] 1821 Manuscript Census returns;[27] 1850 Griffith Valuation[28]

Another measure of the archaic nature of society in south Kilkenny is the high instance of banditry during the eighteenth century. This is exemplified by the careers of Edward Denn and James Freyne ('Freyney the Robber'). Banditry has long been recognised as a response by displaced elites to changing social circumstances. This bandit group were the remnants of the former local gentry whose status was altered by the slow erosion of their own society. The Freynes of Ballyreddy are an excellent example of the continuation of archaic social and cultural lifestyles in the eighteenth century. Having lost their ancestral lands in the Williamite confiscations, they continued a lifestyle 'more after the fashion of Irish tanists'.[38] As cultural leaders, they continued to regulate the dress of people going to mass in Tullagher, cutting mens' long hair and removing ladies' hats considered inappropriate.[39] The prevalence of such practices in south Kilkenny in the eighteenth century illustrates the recency of the demise of the medieval order. This order which was scattered elsewhere by plantation, warfare and confiscation was only eroded in Ida-Iverk by the slow attrition of economic forces.

This survival of older mores and lifestyles was not achieved by insularity from the world outside. Rather the survival of such socio-cultural features was accompanied by an intimate and longstanding relationship with a wider world at the doorstep. This other world was personified by the throbbing maritime and mercantile society of Waterford city, mooring-pin of the south-east Irish and Atlantic economies.[40] The social fabric of the farm villages endured the potentially damaging demographic expansion between 1700 and 1845. It did so by way of its intimate connection with the Atlantic economy. Surplus population fuelled the Newfoundland fishery. The baronies of Ida and Iverk were one of the great source areas of emigration. Indeed, Kilkenny emigrants in Newfoundland were known as 'Doornanes' (named after the farm village of Doornane south of Mooncoin).[41] This safety valve of transatlantic migration coupled with the longstanding movement into Waterford and its client towns helped achieve a demographic equilibrium. Population growth there was but it was not the uncontrollable and pauperising process which afflicted other less market-oriented areas. The settlement pattern and social fabric were therefore less radically transformed. Selective emigration, non-agricultural employment, marriage postponement and clerical vocations kept the rate of growth manageable within the existing framework of society.

The outstanding elements of continuity in this society across a wide range of social markers are vital to an understanding of the ethos and milieu of the area. It therefore can be argued that Ida-Iverk both by its cultural unity and distinctiveness and clear physical expression may be considered a *pays* in the French tradition. This attractive socio-cultural personality is best expressed in the existence of its farm villages.

The farm villages did not only contain farmers. They were not the homogenous, classless clusters of poor farmers outlined in the 'clachan' model. The farm villages were socially varied and economically prosperous. They contained a variety of occupational groups, weavers, tailors, fishermen, blacksmiths and millers as well as agricultural labourers and live-in servants. This social variety appears old and enduring. In 1314, for example, Roger Fitzmiles received sixpence rent from every boat fishing between Tibberaghney and Waterford.[42] This occupational diversity, social stratification and commercialised economy differentiates these farm villages from the 'clachan' of the Evans school. Magheragallon (Gweedore) and Moonveen (Mooncoin) are not just physically far apart in space; in origins, functions and social structures, they are worlds apart.

In Portnahully in 1821, the farm village contained fourteen households, eight of them farmers of between ten and thirty acres, one larger farmer, while four households were headed by an agricultural labourer. There was one landless widow in her own house and no less than ten live-in servants. Portnascully nearby comprised eleven households, seven farmers of greater than ten acres, two labourers, two tradesmen and ten live-in servants.[43] Luffany in the mid-nineteenth century contained fifteen farmers each with twenty-seven acres, one farmer with twenty-four acres, one cottier with three acres and twelve labourers each holding less than one acre. Luffany was also socially segregated with the labourer element living in 'Old Luffany' (which had previously been the site of the residence of Fanny Butler, the middle tenant). The farmers lived in 'New Luffany'.[44] Social segregation was also obvious in the chapel village of Mooncoin itself which housed on the commons a swarming mass of landless labourers who were employed on the productive fields of the adjacent farm villages of Ballytarsney, Pollrone, Doornane

and Grange. This social stratification (as shown in Table 6.2) distinguishes these sites from the western type 'clachan': the strong farmer who was the social leader in south Kilkenny was absent from the 'clachan'. The farm villages are not marginal in either location or function, they are local centrepieces of a rich economic hearthland. Urban contact did not dissipate them: commercial possibilities accompanied the farm villages through history. It is the fundamental stability of the area, accompanied by social diversity, commercial agriculture, medieval roots and geographic location that mark the distinctiveness of these farm villages from the so called western-type 'clachan'.

Historical geographers like other students of Irish history and culture have looked to the west as a reservoir of historic phenomena.[45] Much of the literature dealing with this issue is however misleading. Rural agglomerated settlements devoid of any service function were termed 'clachans'. Dependence on field observation to the exclusion of detailed historic analysis of these clusters is a weakness of some of this work. The origins of what the Ulster geographers studied and termed 'clachans' (a term unknown in Irish) were attributed to very ancient periods in pre and proto-history.[46]

This image of the 'clachan' as being the pristine pre-Goedelic settlement form seems misplaced. Available evidence suggests that 'clachans' and their associated 'infield' and 'outfield' were confined to marginal and hilly land at the limit of human settlement. These were not the sites of earliest human occupation but rather one of the most recent facets of Irish settlement history. The archaic feature of the 'clachan' is its ideal of cooperative land utilisation rather than its occupation of ancient sites. The harsh conditions imposed by settlement of marginal areas and the lack of landlord interest promoted a great flowering of the 'clachan' feature. The 'clachan' is therefore the centrepiece of a pre-Famine landscape of proprietorial disinterest; a physical expression of the adage 'out of sight — out of mind'. In these marginal areas, the practice of shared grazing rights on unenclosed and unimproved pasture made an amount of cooperation conducive to efficient land utilisation. Meagre amounts of arable land, kinship bonds and population buildup in the face of an undiversified economy would have made mutual collaboration imperative. The 'clachan' is best viewed with reference to late settlement expansion, demographic explosion, marginal land, limited economic resources, spade cultivation and subsistence tillage. Clearly these conditions were exceptional and were neither continuous throughout Irish history nor all pervasive in spatial terms at any one time. Many of these marginal clusters termed 'clachans' in west Ulster, Connaught and upland pockets elsewhere were, therefore, a pre-Famine mutant in Irish settlement history.[47]

By contrast, the blending of wealth and age in the south Kilkenny farm villages brings out the ethos of conservatism which permeates the region. Whitewashed and snug, thatch was till recently almost universal within the farm villages. It still survives in the riverine locations adjacent to the reedbeds of the River Suir. These splendid vernacular houses, nerve centres of thriving farms and cobbled haggards, bear the relaxed self-assurance and contented air of prosperity and permanence. House martins flit to thatch-topped eaves over picking hens amid the cobbles. Stable doors are goals for boys hurling the sliothar across the yard. Mouldering horse tackle, salmon gear and black shawls; the smell of cut grass, hearth and cattle; carved headstones of Walshs, Doyles and Dunphys in the lush, green dampness of secluded graveyards; gazing down to the silver and

golden Suir on summer evenings: all images of a place grown old with humanity. The personality of the region is best evoked by the novelist of Moonveen, Patrick Purcell, in his *Hanrahan's Daughter*:

> For the honour of the old parish, for the name of the hurling blood, for the white washed walls of little villages by the river, beneath the hills, Clonmore to Carrigeen, Doornane to Aglish, Moonveen to Luffany, Clogga to Knockanure, for the memory never forgotten of many a hard won triumph, for the bitterness of dark defeat, for the glory evergreen of a half a score All Irelands, for the name and the fame of the victory to be brought home to the quiet houses by the calm river; for the proud smile the prowess of their menfolk would bring to the lips of the gentle women who kept the fire burning at home in the far villages and glens.[48]

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