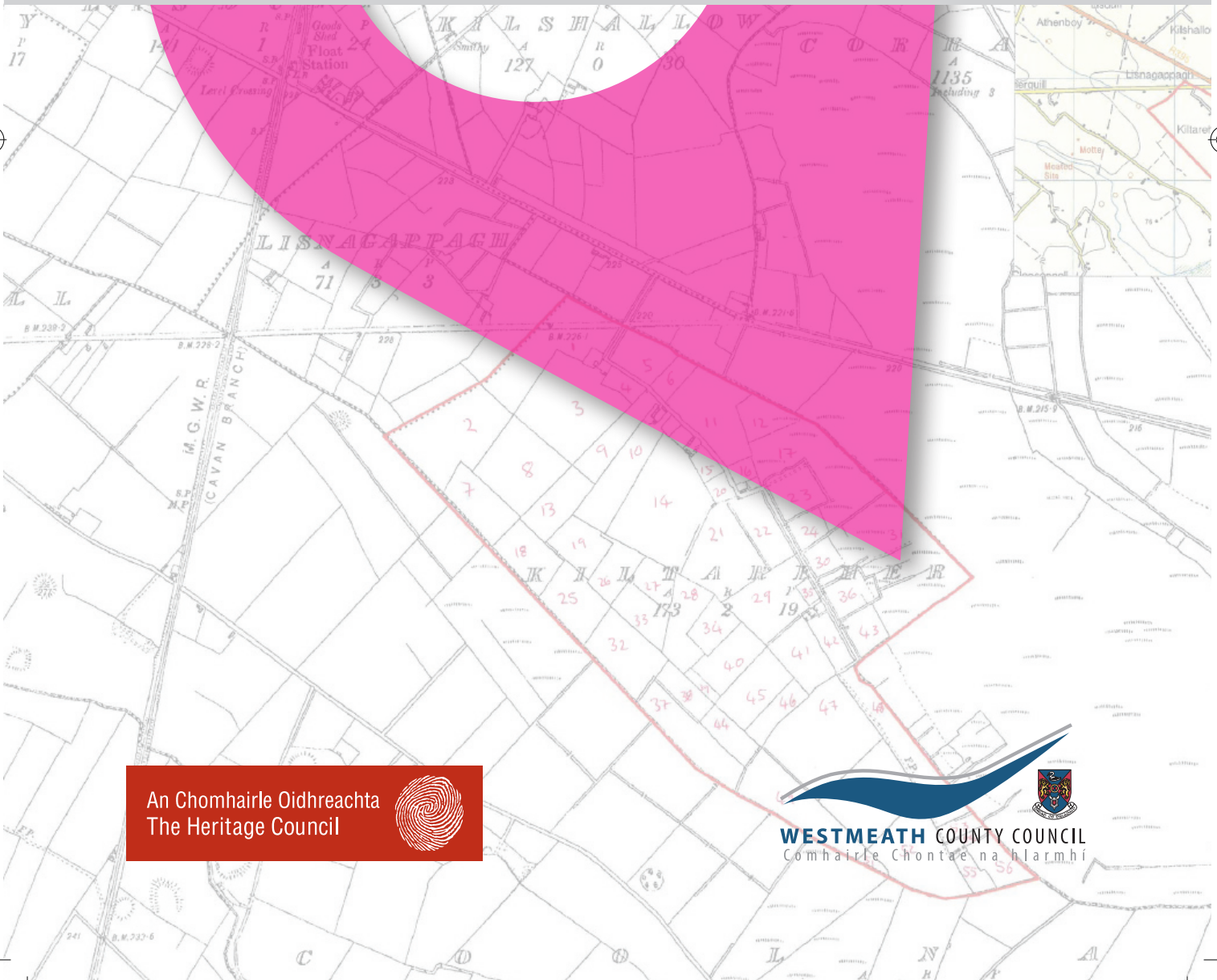
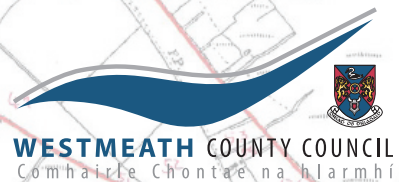
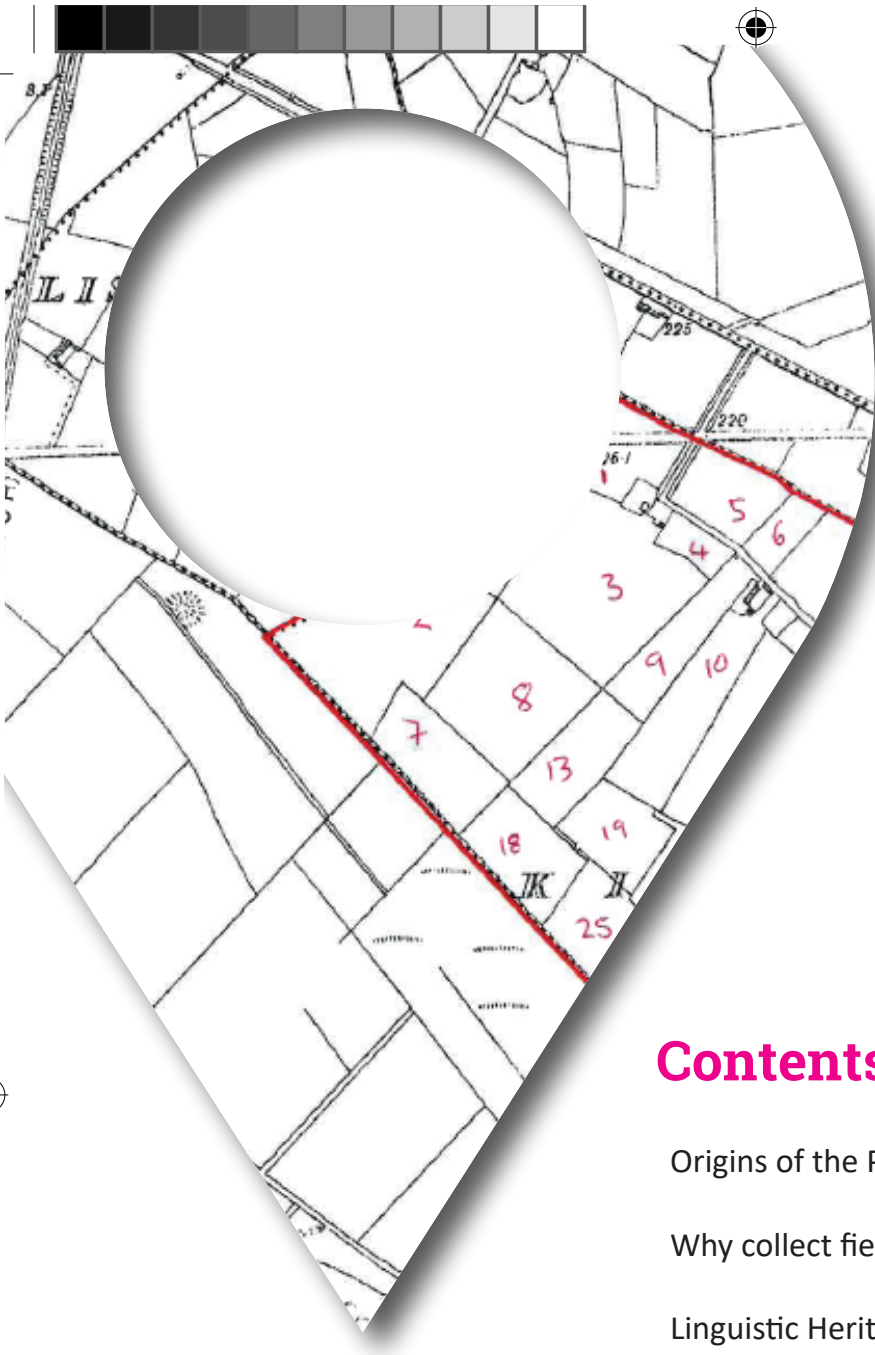


Westmeath Field Names Recording Project



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council





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Origins of the Project

The success of field names projects in Meath, Louth, Kilkenny and other counties in recent years sparked interest in a similar project in Westmeath. Westmeath Archaeological and Historical Society took the initiative and invited Dr Aengus Finnegan to give a lecture entitled 'Collecting and revitalizing minor placenames and field names in Co. Westmeath' in Mullingar on March 8th, 2018, to highlight the potential for such a scheme in the county. With the support of the County Heritage Officer, Melanie McQuade, a steering group was subsequently formed, and a pilot project to record field names in County Westmeath commenced in May 2018. The project is funded by the Heritage Council and Westmeath County Council. The Project Co-ordinator is Dr Aengus Finnegan (University of Limerick), assisted by Justin Ó Gliaáin (Dublin City University).

Why collect field names?

The names of fields are a valuable part of our local heritage, but, in many cases, they are only known to a handful of people, and have never been recorded. These names are being lost as farming changes, with less and less people working the land on a daily basis. Field names can tell us much about our local area - how people appreciated the physical landscape, its hills and hollows, streams, and bogs; but also, its history and traditions of human settlement, from holy wells, to ringforts, *bailte* or house-clusters, burial grounds and landed-estate features. Collecting these names is also an important way of introducing people who have moved into rural areas to the local traditions which have been passed down among their neighbours for generations. Once collected and uploaded, the field names can be viewed on an online map (<https://meitheal.logainm.ie>), giving these names a new lease of life.



Linguistic Heritage

Placenames are conservative by nature and are among the very few sources of information we have for the Irish language in Westmeath - Irish was spoken natively in Co. Westmeath as recently as the early 20th century but the local dialect was never formally recorded. Many Irish field names were recorded in the county during the Schools' Folklore Collection of 1937/8, probably from the older generation who would have heard Irish spoken in their youth. Some of these names may survive today and the locations of the fields themselves could be identified with the assistance of local volunteers. Field names and other local placenames also contain much of interest of English-language origin - dialect words, pronunciations and other local usages peculiar to the various forms of English traditionally spoken in different parts of the county. In addition, family nicknames and local forms of surnames, once important components of the cultural fabric of closely-knit communities all over Ireland, are frequently preserved in field names.

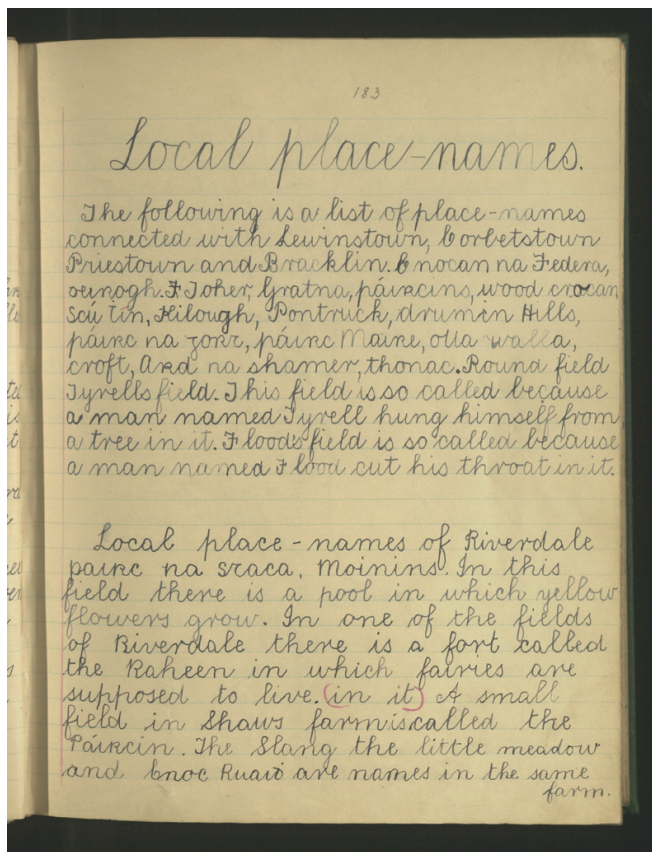


Image 'National Folklore Collection'
<https://www.duchas.ie>

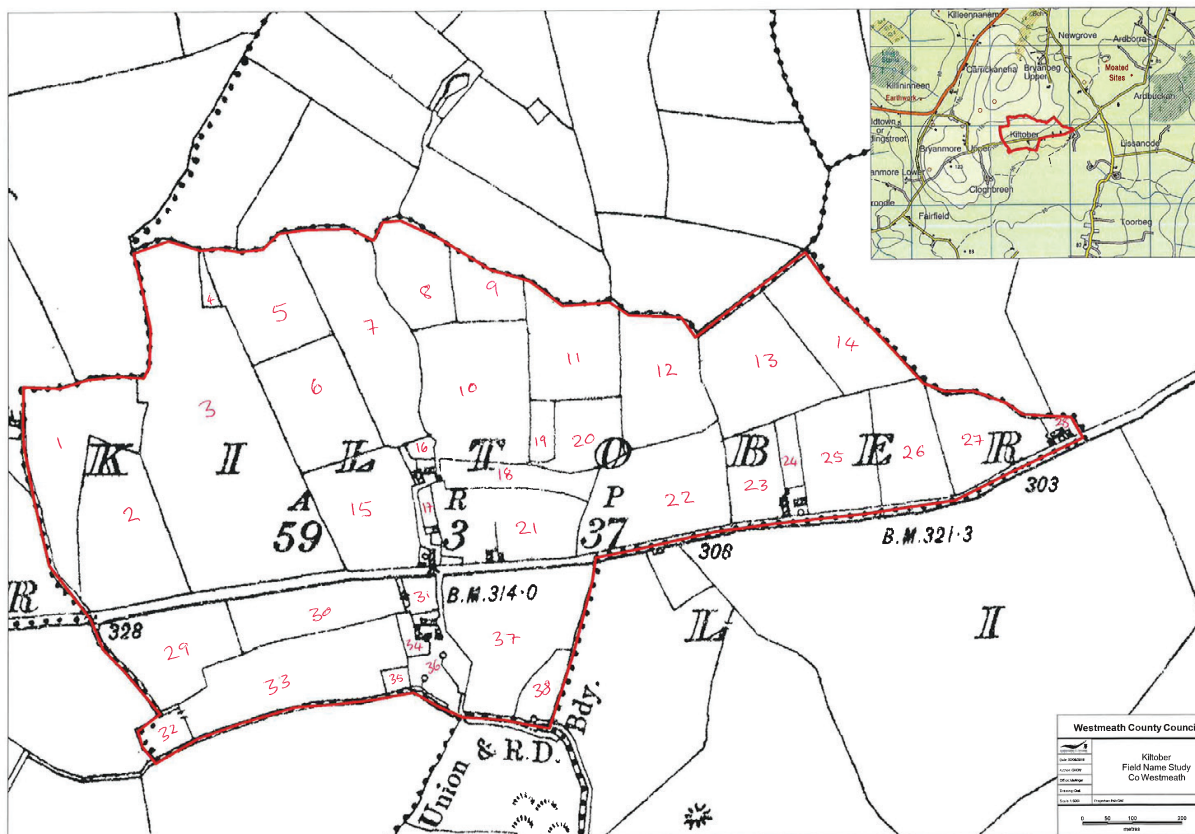


Figure 1 Example of a numbered OS Map

Methodology

A community-led approach has been favoured for the project - ideally a pre-existing group in a parish will take on the collection of the field names in their district, townland by townland. Once a group expresses an interest in taking part, the Project Co-ordinator and the County Heritage Officer will meet with volunteers to explain the project and to identify the townlands which the volunteers wish to survey. Townland maps are then prepared for the volunteers using Ordnance Survey 3rd Edition maps (1911-13) and recent aerial photographs. Fields are numbered left-to-right, north-to-south on each map, so that individual fields can readily be identified. These maps are then issued to volunteers, who are asked to write down the names of the fields in the townland using the Recording Sheet (available for download on the project website <http://aengusfinnegan.ie/field-names/>), making sure to note the field number on the





map. If there are Irish names, or if the form of the name is unclear, volunteers are asked to make a sound-recording of the name. The project co-ordinator will then meet volunteers at intervals to collect the recording sheets and to provide guidance on the collection process. Volunteers are also asked to take photographs, particularly if a field name relates to a prominent landscape feature.



Figure 2 Some of the volunteers from Taughmon at a meeting



Meitheal Logainm.ie

Once the recording sheets have been returned, the field names are uploaded to Meitheal Logainm.ie. This website provides an open-access online repository for collections of minor placenames, with a searchable mapping tool. It has been developed by Fiontar & Scoil na Gaeilge, Dublin City University. This work is carried out by Justin Ó Gliaáin, a PhD student researching minor placenames in Ireland.

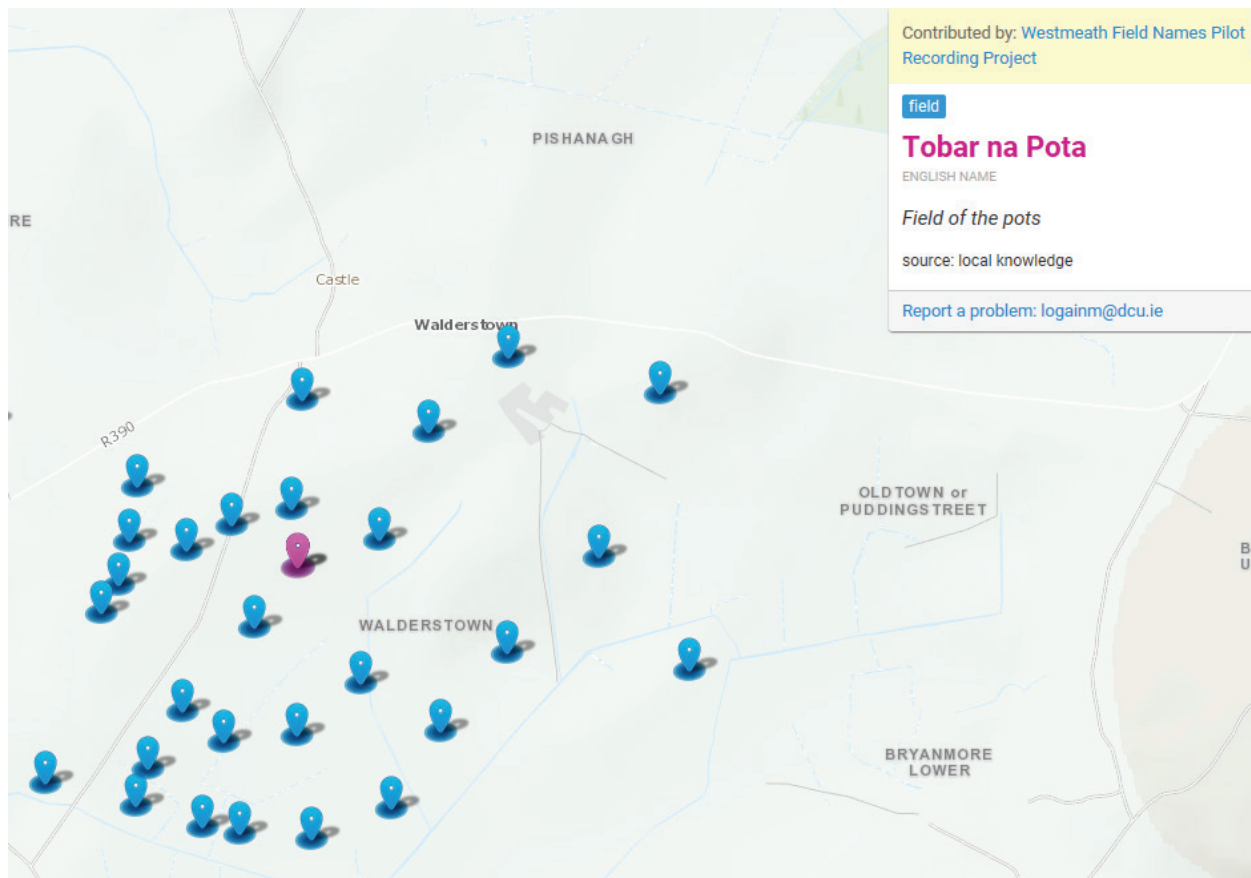


Figure 3 Example of an entry on Meitheal logainm.ie



Phase 1 Results (2018)

To date 750 field names have been collected from sixty-four townlands in three parishes: the majority of names collected are from the parishes of Taghmon in the north of the county and Drumraney in the south. Forty-three volunteers have been involved in the project so far. Most of the field names collected are of English-language origin, and can be relatively easily understood. Commonly occurring examples include: 'The Road Field', 'The High Field', 'The Fort Field' [refers to a ringfort]. In other cases the names require some interpretation: The word 'slang' occurs in four field names in the Taghmon area – 'slang' is an English dialect word, defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as 'a long narrow strip of land'. It is fairly common in field names in the English midlands (see *A New Dictionary of English Field Names*). Some other names which might require some explanation include 'The Furs' (Ardnagragh) - gorse is usually called *furze* in Westmeath; 'The Flaggery Garden' (Moyvoughly) - *flaggers* are Yellow Iris plants, common on wet ground; 'Murry's Marin' (Ardnagragh) - *Murry* is a surname (more commonly spelt *Murray*). The second word is *mereing* (pronounced *mairn*), defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'A boundary'. These are all good Hiberno-English words, and though commonly used by some, they are, perhaps, no longer universally understood.

Some of the field names contain Irish words, personal names, and surnames, which have been borrowed into English: 'Boreen Field' < Ir. *bóithrín*, 'little road'; 'Thady's Division', *Thady* is an anglicised pet-form of the Irish personal name *Tadhg*. 'Doolin's' – this is the name of some fields in Knockatee townland (Taghmon), formerly occupied by a family called Doolin. This is a very common type of field name. The local written form of this surname is usually *Dowling* (according to the volunteer who collected the field names in this townland), but, the pronunciation suggests it might be a form of Ó Dubhláin, often anglicised as *Doolan* or *Dolan*. A similar name is 'Shale's Fields' in Kiltober, Drumraney parish. This is the local pronunciation of the surname *Shiel* or *Shiels*, from Ó Siadhail, and possibly represents the traditional pronunciation of Ó Siadhail in Irish in the midlands.





About seven per cent of the field names recorded to date are of Irish-language origin. It is likely that most of these names date back to the early 19th century, or late 18th century, when Irish was widely spoken in Co. Westmeath. The proportion of Irish names recorded to date is very similar to the findings of the Meath Field Names Project, where over 25,000 field names have been collected. In some cases, these names have been anglicised or partially anglicised, while in other cases the forms collected by the volunteers are probably quite close to the original Irish. One example is 'Lampukan' in Knockbody, in the Taghmon area. This name is very likely Irish, but without hearing a sound-recording of the name as locally pronounced, it cannot easily be interpreted - in 2019 we hope to revisit names such as these and make recordings of the names as pronounced by the original informants, where possible. Another example, which can be more easily explained, is 'The Mullagh', in Fennor, Rathconnell parish. *Mullach* is a hilltop or height and is very common in Irish placenames.

Four interesting Irish names from one farm in Cloghbreen, Drumraney, are 'Croic More', 'Corrawn', 'Tober na hara' and 'The Glan', also called 'Gleann an Uisce'. The first name is almost certainly Cnoc Mór, 'big hill', *cn-* was usually pronounced as *cr-* in Irish in Westmeath, as would have been the case in most of Connacht and Ulster. The second name is probably Cárán 'small rocky patch'. The third name could be Tobar na hEarra. *Tobar* is a 'well', and there is a well shown on the OS 6" map, just outside the southern boundary of this field. The second element might be *earr* 'end, boundary', though again a sound-recording may help with the interpretation of the name. The final name is interesting as it applies to a very clearly identifiable physical feature, a depression in the land which often fills with water. The current landowner said his father called it 'Gleann an Uisce', which means 'glen of the water'. The remarkable survival of these Irish names may be due to the fact that the same family have farmed the townland of Cloghbreen for many generations.



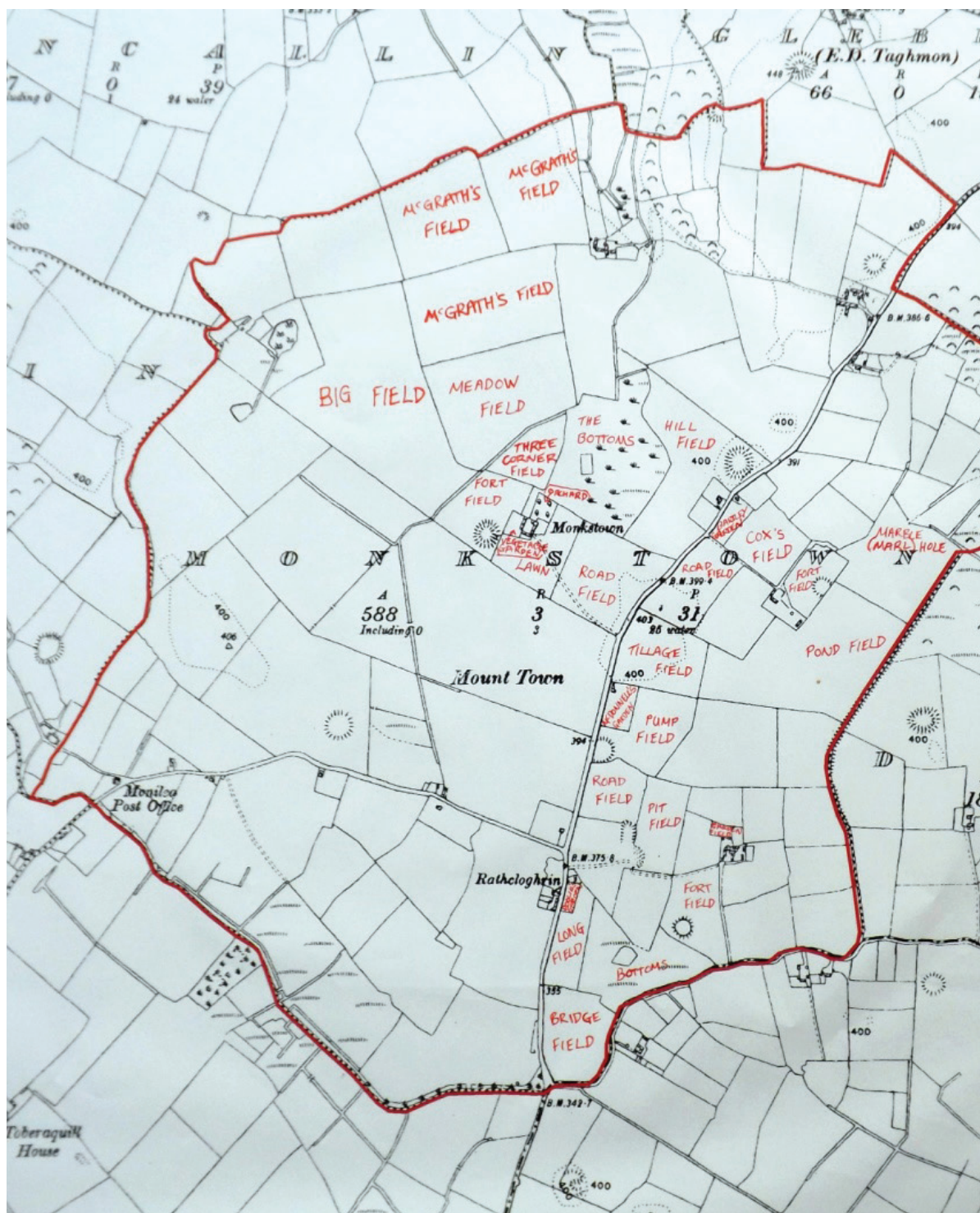


Figure 4 Map showing some of the field names recorded in the townland of Monkstown





Figure 5 Volunteers from Drumraney Parish, Westmeath Field Names Recording Project

Phase 2: 2019

In 2019 we hope to work with four community groups in different parts of the county and further add to our collection of field names from Co. Westmeath. We will also be taking photographs, making sound-recordings, and carrying out further analysis of some of the names collected in 2018.





email: fieldnames@aengusfinnegan.ie

twitter: <https://twitter.com/NamesField/>

websites: <https://meitheal.logainm.ie/westmeath-field-names/>
<http://aengusfinnegan.ie/field-names/>

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