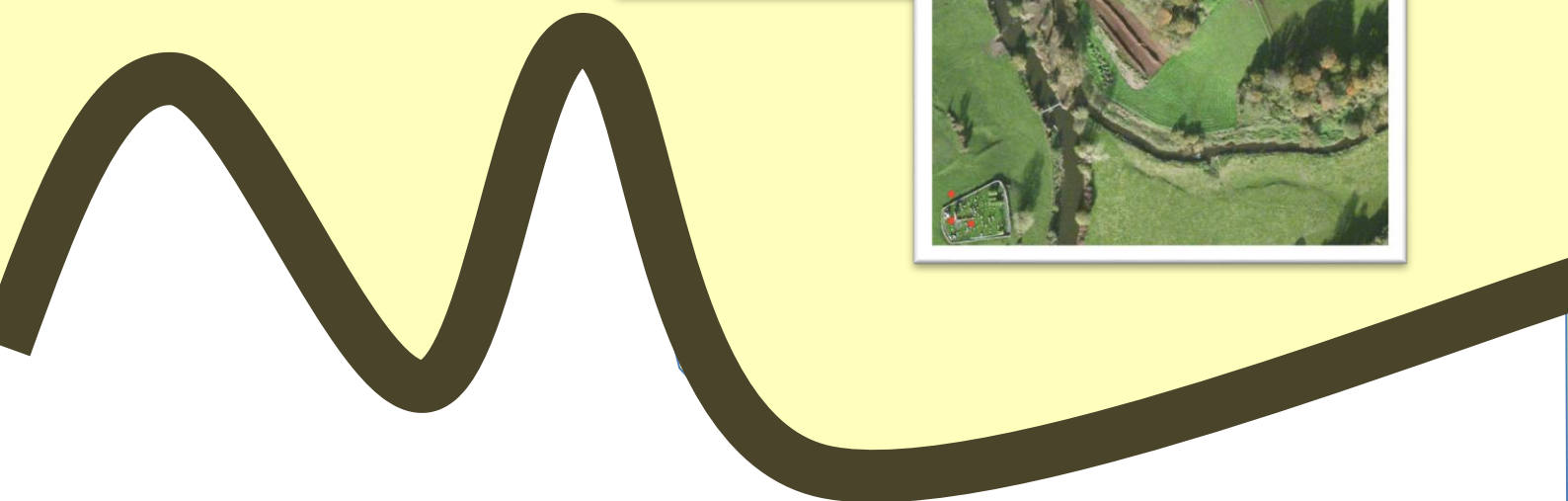


Social and Environmental History of the Maigue River



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Report for the Mague Rivers Trust 2019

Introduction

A range of historical sources including maps, newspapers, and government commissions were consulted to provide an overview of the nature of human interactions with and influences of, the river Maigue over time. Each of these sources could be the sole focus of examination, however, what is included here is intended as an exploration of a cross-section of sources. The document is ordered according to archaeology, maps and surveys, placenames, built heritage, drainage, fishing and finally the river in the newspapers.

Archeology

The most readily identifiable part of Limerick's archaeology is its prehistory (the period before written records) according to Thomas Johnson Westropp (1860-1922) antiquarian and archeologist who published extensively on the Limerick region and on the landscape of the Maigue (Figure 1; Westropp 1904, 1907, 1908, 1916). In his paper on typical earthworks and ring-walls in county Limerick, Westropp comments that study of the Limerick region has been largely neglected (Westropp 1916).

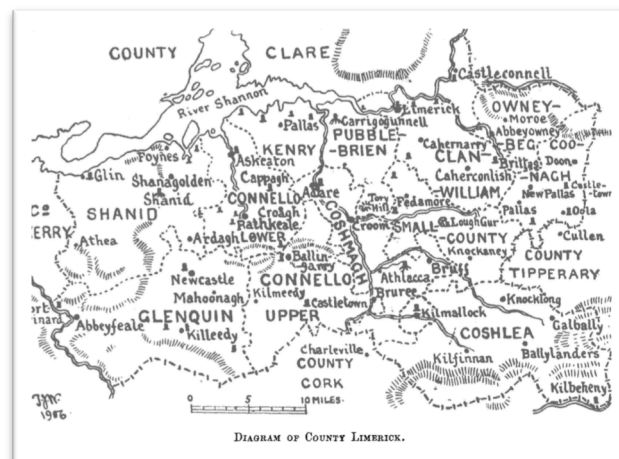


Figure 1: Diagram of County Limerick (Source Westropp 1908, p. 297)

An examination of archaeological artefacts on Archaeology.ie historical environment mapviewer (Figure 2) revealed c. 224 national monuments. This examination encompassed 167 km of Maigue catchment rivers (downstream of Kilfinane on the Loobagh, Ballylanders on the Morningstar, Knocklong on the Camoge and Ballyfoleen on the Clonshire) and the

main Mague channel in the immediate *circa* 100 m river corridors (c. 50 m either side of the river bank). By far the most common features along these river corridors are Bronze/Iron Age ring barrows (30%) and enclosures (24%) (Figure 3). Ring barrow burial sites are circular or oval raised areas enclosed by outer banks and date to between c. 2400 BC - AD 400. An example of a ring barrow is found in the townland of Moohan on the Camoge. Enclosures are also defined by an enclosing bank, wall, or steep slope but occur in a variety of shapes and sizes and are not as easily classified dating to any period from prehistory onwards. An example of an enclosure is found in Tooreen at the junction of the Camoge and the main Mague channel. The richest archaeological heritage per kilometer of river corridor is the Mague, followed by the Camoge and Morningstar.

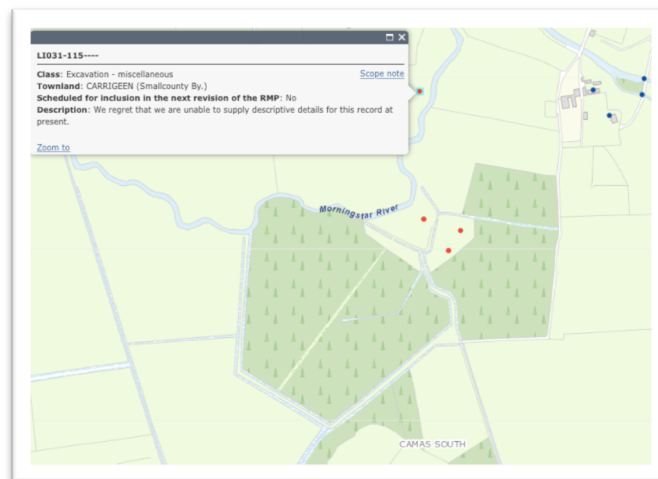


Figure 1: Historic environment view of the Morningstar River at Camus South with 4 archaeology sites (red dots) and 5 architectural sites (blue dots). One of the archaeological sites, an excavation site at Carrigeen, is labeled. Source Archaeology.ie.

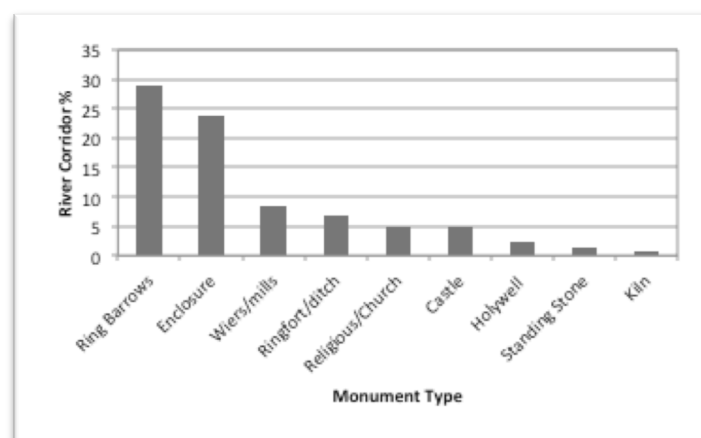


Figure 3: Summary of archaeological features in the 100m river corridors along 167 km of Mague catchment channels.

Ringforts feature to a lesser extent along the river channels. Ringforts or raths are generally circular or oval in area and are surrounded by one or more earthen banks with an external fosse or defensive ditch. They functioned as residences and/or farm buildings and generally date from 500 to 1000 AD. In Westropp's paper on enclosures and ring walls his perusal of Ordnance Survey Maps suggest that in 1840 there were about 2,150 forts in the county of Limerick (Westropp 1916). This number may however include earlier enclosures. An example is the ringfort – rath in Caherelly West found today in level reclaimed pasture. The rath has an oval area (23.5m N-S; 28m E-W) with an entrance (width 5.5m) at the south. Westropp (1907) refers to a number of Mague catchment forts listed in Leabhar na gCeart (a document dating to early or late tenth century). Among those listed are Brughrigh (Bruree), Dun Gair (Lough Gur), Asal (Drum Asail or Tory Hill) and Druim Finghin (Kilfinnan) '*of the wood and with it Treada na riogh*' triple fort of the king. Kilfinnan is described as Limerick's finest high Mote by Westropp (1916) and is thought to have once had five rings. The mote lies in a location where an English settlement features after the middle of the fourteenth century and a castle is only mentioned after 1657 (Westropp 1907). Other smaller motes of note in the river corridors with lower earthworks are Knockaunacumsa, Illaunaholata, and Millmount at Kilmallock (which today has two enclosures visible (Archaeology.ie), and the motes of Knocklong (ringfort – rath) and Eagle Mount (or Mounteagle which has two enclosures and one ringfort) of Bruree. The Schools Folklore Collection mentions Dohora fort near Lissoleen Bruree, a large double-ringed fort, with an outer ring diameter 51 meters and an inner ring diameter of 26 meters.

Two islands in Lough Gur are recorded as island forts or Crannogs (or lake dwellings) by Westropp (1915) and he alludes to one being repaired in 1002 AD. Archaeology.ie illustrates a Crannog on the southern shore of Gur in the townland of Ballynagallagh and a second in the northeast corner of the lake. The main lake island contains a concentration of archaeological features indicative of habitation.

Two major religious houses are found in the river corridor of the Camogue. The first is the extensive ruins of Monasteranenagh (Manister) a Cistercian Abbey built in 1148. The 'Monastery of the Friar' is listed as Mainistirnambratherbeg on the 6" OS (1838-1842). A

second religious house downstream belonged to the Franciscans or white friars and was founded in the 13th century for the Franciscan Third Order Regular. The Abbey was called Clochnamanach or *Cloch na Manach*, which means the stone of the monks. The extensive ruins of the abbey underwent restoration works in 1932. Both monasteries were dissolved by Henry VIII sometime between the 1530s and 1540s.

In the mid-1200s the valleys of the Saimer (Morningstar) and the 'Commogue' and the Maigue river itself, are guarded at all important points by the strongholds of Adare, Croom, Castle Robert, Aney, Kilmallock, and Bruree (Westropp 1907). Adare is described as the central fortress of the county and the roads and fords secured out to Kilmallock, Askeaton, and Limerick. In 'Sweet Adare' by Gerald Griffin (1803-1840) and also from the school folklore collection Henry Morgan, Clounanna (1935) describes the story of St. Patrick being attacked by the fire-breathing bull. St Patrick was unable to overtake the evil spirit until he reached the River Maigue at Adare and there at the ford he seized the monster by the tail and slew him with his crooked staff giving the legendary name, Ath-tarb (or ford of the bull). No evil thing was able to cross the running water. Ath-tarb is near Croom.

Direct evidence of community social and economic identity associated with fishing activity is found in the archaeological relics of past fishing practices. These are evident in the Maigue and Shannon estuaries on every low tide. Ten fish weirs or wooden barriers of varying heights and forms have been found in estuarine clays at the mouth of the Maigue river. These weirs were built for the purpose of diverting fish into a trap. Medieval wooden fish traps, have also been found at the mouths of the rivers Deel, Fergus and Bunratty. Most traps date to between the fifth and the thirteenth century AD (O'Sullivan 2001). The Shannon estuary fish weirs tend to be small, V-shaped post-and-wattle structures (O'Sullivan 2004). The basket-traps were generally hidden in the narrow, deep-water channels that dissect the estuary's vast mud flats. The Maigue weirs include a stake-net weir, 5-6 m of posts aligned N-S, and a small creek trap. The Maigue estuary examples all appear to be post medieval, dating to between the 18th and 19th C.

Topography

Historical maps illustrate the legacy of the built environment long after all physical traces have been extinguished. A 1610 map of the *Province of Leinster and Munster* records the Maigue River (Figure 4). In the *Down Survey of Ireland, 1656-1658* the Maigue was included but was not named (Figure 5).

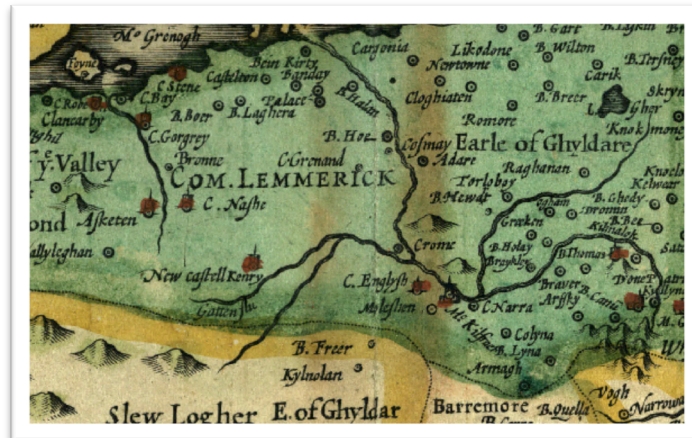


Figure 4: 1610 - Map of the Province of Leinster and Munster (excerpt)
By John Speed



Figure 5: Down Survey of Ireland, 1656-1658 (excerpt)

An examination of key historical Ordnance Survey maps (available on Archaeology.ie) reveals further catchment characteristics. The Ordnance Survey (OS) 6" maps (scale 6

inches: 1 mile) were created between 1838-1842. These are the first comprehensive series of maps covering the whole of Ireland, which was the first country in the world to be mapped in this manner. This series is available in both colour and B&W versions. The OS 25-inch Maps (scale 25-inches: 1 mile) mostly date from the 1890s up to c.1915 with later printings. These are very good for showing individual features in the landscape. Lastly the Cassini maps (scale 6 inches: 1 mile) were produced in the 1790s are good for tracking the existence of features originally seen on earlier maps. For example, Moohan barrow and ringfort is visible on Cassini-6 inch but not on the 6-inch or 25-inch maps.

Figure 6 illustrates an enclosure in the townland of Tooreen, Clanwilliam northeast of the junction of the Camogue and the Maigne as well as a graveyard, church and ecclesiastic enclosure in the townland of Anhid East west of the main Maigne channel. The legacy of these structures can be viewed on the historical maps and digital photographs. These structures clearly predate 1838 and have survived in the landscape.

Topographical Dictionaries and Surveys

Key pertinent historical surveys include the *Down Survey of Ireland, 1656-1658* and the *Civil Survey of 1655*, which chart a changing Irish society. Topographical dictionaries also provide very useful detail on the historical environment. Key sources include *Lewis's Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (1837) and Griffith's Valuation (c.1855). The former provides an overview of land ownership in pre famine Ireland, while the latter reveals changes to the landscape following that calamity.

Westropp (1908) chronicles a forested landscape with early 10th century references to south-eastern Limerick which allude to "*great hills and moors and woods*" with great stags, the green tulachs, whence "*the grey one of three antlers*" was hunted. Views blocked by trees are described and it is only when Cuchullin ascends Drum Collchailli (Drumcollogher) that he is able to say where they were, with hills visible in every direction.

In 1583, the Maigne Valley was then well wooded and with 'underwoods'. Ash is prominent at Cloneferty, Ballyfowken, Ballynowrane, and Palmerston. Lysshenaconnoe, Kilfinnan, Scortnageeragh and Curragh on the Maigne had substantial tree cover. In contrast,

Cossetlerough near Kilmallock was cleared by the late 1500s. According to Westropp (1909) the fisheries on the Maigue were associated with the tenure on the woods.

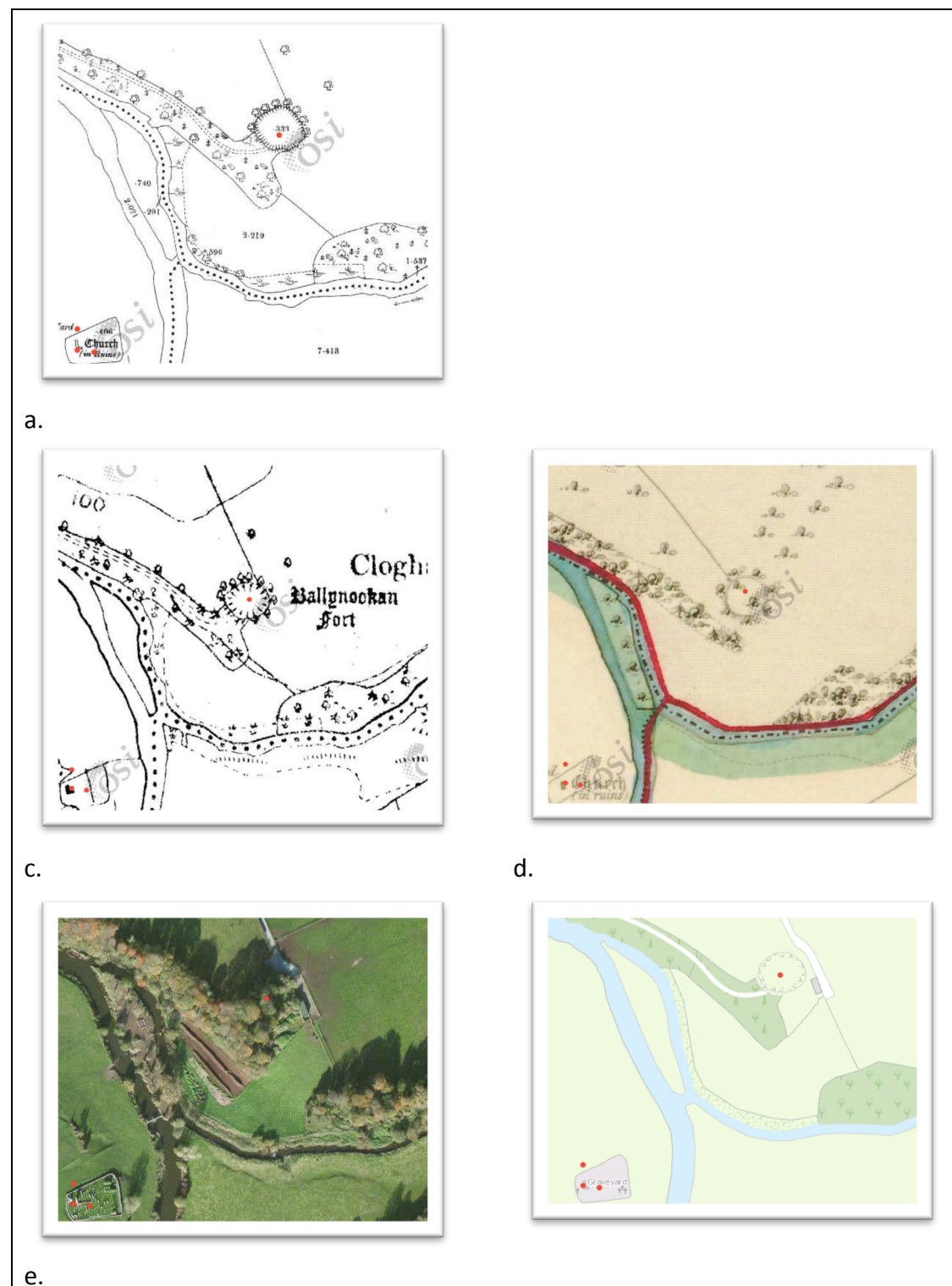


Figure 6: An enclosure (Tooreen) and graveyard (Anhid East) at the junction of the Camogue and the Maigue viewed in (b) historic 25-inch, (c) Cassini 6-inch (d) historic 6-inch and (e) digital globe (a) historic environment map viewer

The *Civil Survey of 1655* shows dense forests lay on the slopes and lower hills, and treeless uplands. There were about 1,300 acres of wood and shrubbery in Adare, Groom, and Athlacca parishes in 1655. Only occasional names like Derryvinnane or Adare (the Oak ford) are found. In 1909, Westropp suggested that the Mague Valley, with its ancient residences and tribes, was possibly comparatively cleared land, by the pre-Christian period. The Civil Survey also mentions the presence of up to 8 eel weirs on the Camoge between the Mague confluence and Dunkip (Went, 1960).

In Samuel Lewis's *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (1837) the entry for Adare mentions the Mague [sic] '*the ancient town of Adare is situated on the eastern riverbank of the Mague... the river is very broad, and from several artificial weirs appears like a succession of lakes, but beyond the bridge it becomes very shallow.*' An examination of the 6 inch map reveals 9 weirs between Adare Bridge and Castleroberts bridge upstream.

One article describes two gentlemen who found themselves on the North bank of the bank of the river opposite the Mague at a height of 4,261 ft asl and describe large fields looking like pocket handkerchiefs, with a sad waste of lands under numerous stone walls. They refer also to some [people] along the river who were in favour of draining lands by sinking the bed of the river Mague.

Placenames

The Civil Survey in 1654 of County Limerick describes few native landowners, yet many old place-names survived. The name of the river is given as 'Ess-Maighe' in the Book of Leinster (1160), and signifying *the waterfall of the River Mague from the fort on the margin*. In Joyce's *Names and Places* (1883) the Irish name for the Mague River - according to the old authorities is Tnflit/Maigh or River of the Plain. The Morningstar has a wide chronology of names including Samhair, Samer and Caimher translating as the shining one, daybreak or river dawn. The Samir is used in the Civil Survey in 1655 or by its corruptions Kuavier and Caumire and is described as one of the seven great rivers of Ireland by Lynch (1920). The Irish name of Curraghbridge, near Adare in Limerick, is '*Opoier-ncoppa*', the bridge of the weir or dam, and it is anglicised by leaving coppa nearly unchanged, and translating '*Opoi6ec*' to bridge. Other names included for the Mague catchment in the Civil Survey include Dromeolliher, the ridge

or hill of the hazel, Ahabeg in the parish of Carrigparson, the little green and Turagh in parish of Tuogh, the yew land.

Today, the Morningstar river is a narrow, relatively shallow stream, however in past times this important river and tribal boundary widened and formed a lake or lakes south of Knocklong which '*extended over the ground around Ballinahmch (town of the island) and Island-dromagh (the island of the ridges), and close to Emlygrennan, probably spreading south and west towards Kilfinane*' (Lynch 1920). River crossings or fords are described at Ahadoon and Athneasy (Ath nDeise) and Aughavoona (Ath an mhona) the latter which translates as the ford of the bog. Aughavoona must have been an important river crossing because close by is Ilaunaholta moat and the remains of a low earthwork perhaps constructed as a ford defense. Lynch (1920) describes Emly with a lake and being almost entirely surrounded by water up to 200 years ago. The Irish name Imleach lubhair translates as the '*lake side place of the yew tree*'. Local tradition suggests that a boat could sail westwards by the line of the Dromcamoge river from Knocklong to Emly. The lake is marked on the Down Survey map as 'the red bog' and map contours suggest poor drainage and thus swampy lands, even in the historic period.

The owner of Kilcolman Castle, three miles northeast of Buttevant Co. Cork, Edmund Spenser constructed stories about the rivers flowing on or near his estate (Smith 1935). His fondness for the Irish landscape and the topographical legends connected with it is demonstrated in his writing about Diana and Áine, Irish water goddesses who bathed in the Mulla (the Awbeg) and Camoge. Áine was worshipped on the commanding height of Cnoc Áine, now Knockainey, ten miles north of the source of Spenser's own Bregoge River. Diana was "*whelm'd with stones*" and is credited with the laying of a stone causeway over the Camoge at Knockainy.

*First into many parts his streame he shar'd,
That whilst the one was watcht, the other might
Passe vnespide to meete her by the way;
And then besides, those little streames so broken
He vnderground so closely did conuay . .*

(an extract from Spenser's River Stories)

Spenser also describes how once lovely lakes and streams are now dry and rocky beds, like those of the Bregoge and the Camoge. Explanations of these vanished lakes and stony expanses are numerous in the topographical folklore of this region providing Spenser's sources for his river stories.

A Schools' Folklore extract (1937-1938) describes the Maigue river valley of Glenma, Gleann Máighe (near Athlacca) *"a rather deep glen on the Maigue valley in Banogue parish has to its east level uplands which at no very considerable time ago had no intersecting fences"* making it a suitable place for coursing meetings. One particular match final between the dog of the local curate and the landlord 'Ivers' was won by the curate's dog. However, the judge was a supporter of the landlord and *"gave the course"* to Ivers dog causing outrage among the locals. The priest calmed his supporters by telling them that there would not be any Ivers in the glen before long and the Ivers dog was *"as good as dead"*. He must have had divine foresight because *'the Celt replaced the baron with the Scandinavian sounding name'*.

Bruree or Brugh-righ which translates as the fort or palace of the king and there are still remaining extensive earthen forts, the ruins of the ancient brugh (palace) (Joyce 1883). It was the principal seat of 'OilioUOlum', king of Munster in the second century and afterwards of the O'Donovans, chiefs of Hy Carbery (or the flat lands around Bruree and Kilmallock). The name Bruff is a corruption of Brugh or 'Bnihh-na-leise', and is derived from mansion of the ancient territory (Joyce 1883). The brugh, or mansion, that gave name to this place, still exists; it is an earthen fort near the town, called at the present day by the people, 'Uipfn-a-bhpota', the little 'lis' of Bruf.

Built Heritage

The built heritage of the wider Limerick region is explored extensively in Westropp's papers on Churches (1904) and Castles (1907). An examination of the river Maigue catchment main river corridors (Archaeology.ie) reveals 68 elements of architectural heritage. This includes 31 buildings, 37 bridges or items of architectural interest followed by dwelling houses (Figure 7).

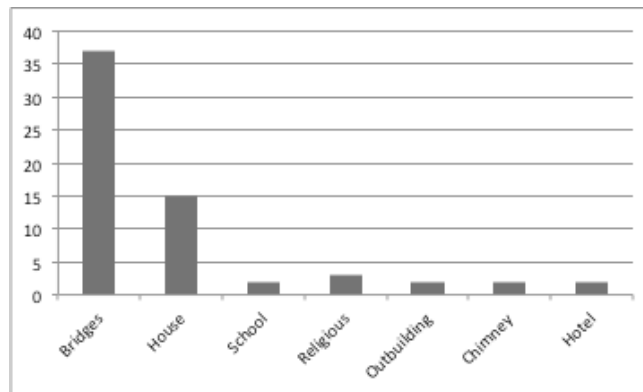


Figure 7: Summary of architectural features in the 100m river corridors along 167 km of Maigne catchment channels.

River Bridges

There are 37 bridges of architectural merit and a further 31 unclassified on the main river channels (167km). The bridges date to between 1790 and 1895 with the majority, ten bridges, constructed between 1790 and 1810 while a further seven date to 1810-1830. Bridge density is highest on the Camoge and Loobagh with 10 and 6 bridges each. They range from single arches in the upper reaches of the catchment to five arches downstream (Figure 8). Single arch bridges include the sandstone Ballynaminna bridge on the Loobagh which was built in c.1820, Ballynahinch on the Morningstar built in 1896 and Ballycahill bridge on the Camoge built c.1800. Glenogra bridge on the Camogue carries the R511 and has five arch's and was built in 1780. Three bridges located to the north-west and east of Camus built between c. 1838 were built by Frederick Bevan Esq of Camas and display the work of skilled craftsmen.

Buildings

Along the main river channel corridors thirty-three architectural elements are listed as having heritage value. Of these, the majority are houses (9), country houses (7), religious houses or schools (7). Some of the unique elements include a railway station, a barracks, a disused creamery, an outbuilding, mausoleums and a vent pipe. Adare railway station dates from 1856 and was closed in 1963. According to the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) *'the station is solidly constructed and its gabled form and limestone construction are characteristic of many railways stations of the time. It was built using high quality materials with considerable skill.'* The former Royal Irish Constabulary barracks in the small village of Monaster, built c. 1820, was once the site of a blacksmith and became a post office more

recently, demonstrating a changing historical fabric. A rare corrugated-iron creamery at Knockainy on the Camoge dates from 1870. The outbuildings at Camus on the Morningstar was built in c. 1820 and includes multiple-bay, two-storey buildings which are the only remains of Camus House which was destroyed by fire. These roughly dressed limestone walls with brick finishes include the former coach house. Four mausoleums are found in the grounds of Saint John's Church of Ireland Church, Knockainy, evidence of a once prosperous Church of Ireland community in the locality. One of the more unusual architectural features is a vent pipe in Bruff. This freestanding cast-iron vent pipe, c. 1900, was part of a sewage system installed in Bruff during the late nineteenth century. Additionally, a tall square-plan red brick chimney, built in 1892 is the only remains of a disused creamery, and is a reminder of the industrial history of Athlacca.

Weirs

Just five water regulating weirs or dams to control water levels on the Camoge river are found on the Archaeology Mapviewer, however, examination of the OS 6-inch map reveals a further eight weirs for the Camoge. The weirs date the late medieval period (c. 1400-1500s AD) onwards. Weirs were still widely used into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Of the 13 weirs found between Cloghanduff Bridge and Monaster Bridge on the Camoge; nine are described as eel weirs. These were used to trap eels intertidal zone as the tide recedes, as they migrate downstream.

O'Sullivan (2001) has shown that eel weirs were often located beside monastic sites and this is certainly the case for Monaster in which are located the extensive ruins of Monasteranenagh Cistercian Abbey, built in 1148. The Adare weirs are also described in Lewis's *Topographical Dictionary*.

Mills

Four mills powered by water are found on Archaeology.ie, one each on the Camoge (Glenogra an unclassified mill) and Loobagh (a corn mill at Glenfield), and two on the Morningstar (a Tuck Mill at Athlacca and Ballylanders (unclassified)) and a corn mill on the Clonshire (at Coolballyshane). Perusal of the 1837 OS map reveals further mills.






| | |
|---|---|
|  |  |
| Ballynaminna Bridge, Loobagh | Cloughansoun Bridge, Camogue |
|  |  |
| Longford Bridge, Camogue | Bruff Bridge, Morningstar |
|  | |
| Glenogra, Camogue | |

Figure 8: Bridges on the Mague river channels. Source Archaeology.ie

The mills often included a millrace and millpond and generally date from the 7th century onwards. Freshwater mills were historically found throughout Ireland serving a wide variety of uses. The milling industry in Ireland consisted of two distinct types: food processing and the production of textiles. According to (Lewis, 1837: 228) two mills were situated in Bruree; a

boulting mill (used in the process of sifting flour) and a grist mill (used chiefly for oatmeal). The Ordnance Survey map of the same year noted a further two mills in Bruree, a tuck mill and a carding mill. O'Connor (2015) stated that '*a tuck mill was used in the woollen industry to improve the quality of the woven fabric by repeatedly combing it, producing a warm worsted fabric.*'

The proliferation of tuck mills situated along the tributaries of the Mague and on the river itself were integral to development of the local economy from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. A tuck mill is situated at Dromacommer Cottage, southeast of Howardstown Bridge and was recorded on the c.1837 map. To the east of the town of Athlaca, a second tuck mill was located on the Morningstar River. The town of Bruff, through which the Morning Star passes, was the site of flour mill. In the townland of Baggotstown, south of Bruff, a corn mill is also marked on the c.1837 map. These mills, formerly essential to the local economy in the early decades of the nineteenth-century, had fallen into disuse by the time the c.1890 OS map was produced. According to the Irish Manufacture Movement, the cost of erecting a tuck mill in 1850 was between £150 and £200. This considerable sum may have been a contributory factor to the decline of the industry in county Limerick (*Limerick Reporter*, 7 June 1850). The decline in the need for water power over the last 100 years saw a reduction in the number of operational mills. Despite this decline, the associated river structures were rarely removed.

Drainage

Two types of drainage, arterial and field, were widely practiced in the Mague catchment. Arterial drainage involves the artificial widening and deepening of main rivers and important tributaries in order to increase their effectiveness in draining their catchment areas. Field drainage comprises activities necessary to remove surplus water from fields. For the drainage process to be successful one process is contingent on the other. Key pieces of legislation driving drainage practices included the Drainage (Ireland) Act of 1842 and the Arterial Drainage Act in 1945.

Land reclamation and river modifications around the Shannon Estuary are thought to have commenced as early as 1100 AD (Healy & Hickey 2002). The Down Survey Maps (1655)

suggests some reclamation by the mid-1600s. The development of inland navigation began in Ireland in 1715, with the 'improvement' of the Maigue River.

Arterial drainage of the Maigue catchment commenced following the Drainage Act 1945. The intention being to reduce periodic flooding, improve the drainage of water off the land and facilitate the primary motivation to improve agricultural productivity. Projections of a major increase in farm outputs including stocking rates and profits from livestock following drainage were anticipated and over 2000 landowners were expected to benefit from the River Maigue arterial drainage scheme. In the lower reaches of the Maigue, flood embankments, back drains and flapped outlets were constructed. Construction costs of the arterial works were estimated at 437.80 pounds per acre of agricultural land at design stage. However subsequent examination of the costings showed over-runs of approximately 30% (Bruton & Convery 1982).

At peak works Limerick Council had a total of some 250 operatives employed on the scheme. Multiple field drainage improvement schemes were undertaken throughout the Maigue catchment area between 1973 and 1986 particularly after the 1974 Farm Modernisation Scheme. It has been estimated that arterial drainage impacted between 6-10 % of county Limerick as a whole, while 20-25% of lands were affected by field drainage.

The arterial drainage schemes undertaken under the 1945 Act were not preceded by ecological assessments and they have generally been regarded as having a devastating impact on the ecology and fisheries of the drained catchments including the Maigue.

Fishing the Maigue

Historically, the Maigue was renowned as a salmon and eel fishery. The 17th century Civil Survey refers to a weir at Mainistir where eels and pike were trapped. Pike are regarded as an introduced species, and this is one of the earliest references to their occurrence in Ireland (Went, 1960). Up to the middle of the 17th century, there were at least seven head weirs in the Maigue estuary below Adare where salmon were taken. There were also two salmon weirs associated with the monastic settlements in Adare up to the dissolution of the monasteries (Went 1960). The importance of fishing the Maigue is evident through

references to *“Kilmallock as medieval trout town”, “blood and bone trout fisherman”* and *“Loobagh anglers [...] who could never recall when they began fishing, so undivided was it from the thread of their lives”* (McGuane 2001).

By the end of the 19th century, salmon runs had declined significantly, probably because of over fishing in the Shannon Estuary. Evidence of this is found in an extract from a Fisheries Inspector Report from 1985.

“Let me direct your attention to the River Maigue, which flows into the Shannon estuary a few miles below Limerick. This was once a well-known salmon angling river, but according to the testimony of Mr. R., who was born on its banks, it has totally erased from people’s minds as a fishing stream owing to over-netting at its mouth and in the estuary, and consequent dearth of salmon. (A Salmon Fisher’s Revolt. A letter addressed by the Earl of Howth to the Irish Fisheries Inspectors 1895.)

The productivity of the fishery had consequences for protection of the fish stocks. Poaching as an issue. A heavy-handed response to the issue of fish poaching on the Maigue, was the subject of a parliamentary debate in 1894. A police constabulary report found that there was excessive poaching on the River Maigue and water bailiffs employed by the Limerick Conservators were trying to establish control. A Mr. T.M. Healy asked if the Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland was aware that a water bailiff was charged at Croom with firing a revolver. The same individual was fined the previous year for having been drunk while in possession of a revolver. The case was dismissed on the grounds that the shot was only fired to attract the attention of another water bailiff. Questions were asked as to whether persons living on the banks of the River Maigue were seriously alarmed at the way in which armed bailiffs use or threaten to use their pistols under the pretext of preserving the river from poachers. However, the response was that no respectable persons in the locality have ever complained of the conduct of the bailiffs.

Poacher Bill Griffaun used to fish for salmon in the Morningstar and the police and water bailiffs were always after him. One day he lay under the water for three hours until they were tired of searching for him. Colonel Massey, a landlord from near Galbally, used to buy the fish

from him and often paid his fine (Schools' manuscript collection digital.ucd.ie/view/duchas:4956024).

In 1907, a conflict between the Earl of Dunraven, of Adare Manor, and his tenant, George Spearing, of Baybus, Adare was the subject of a parliamentary debate. Tenant farmer Spearing alleged part of his land holding (13 acres) had been flooded by the diversion of a stream by Lord Dunraven as the result of construction of fish hatcheries in the River Maigue. Spearing was also unwilling to relinquish his sporting rights and his claim to sand and gravel. He requested that the Estates Commissioners mediate a reduced rent or instigate legal proceedings for damages from the Earl of Dunraven.

A description of the Maigue tributary Glasha (or Glashawee) collected as part of the Schools' Folklore scheme (1937-1938) describes the river as

it bends and swings in a most astonishing manner...it was known at least a hundred years ago as a famous spawning ground for salmon and trout ... and has lost nothing of its reputation in that matter during recent years.... Interview these fish on their honeymoon..... greatly disappointed to see no more than one pair of salmon upon all of the many suitable spawning beds with which the river abounds. There were however a great many "scouvers" or patches of freshly rooted gravel showing that fish had been at work there.

Maigue in the News

Between 1839 and 1989, there are 84 references to the Maigue in national and provincial newspapers, which tracked some of the key changes experienced in the river and catchment. The majority of the articles appear in the *Irish Times* (36) followed by the *Irish Examiner* (26). Thirteen other papers, the majority provincial, account for the remaining articles, with the most found in the *Limerick Leader* (8). The articles predominantly relate to fisheries (32%), property sales (19%) and drainage (14%).

1800-1850

As early as 1825, the issue of illegal fishing for eel on the Maigue was reported in the *Dublin Evening Post*, which described the activities of individuals who had established openings along the river without first acquiring an official licence. It is interesting to note that when the c. 1900 map was recorded, no weirs – eels or otherwise – were to be found along the same stretch of river. O’Sullivan (2001) has suggested that a decline in the consumption of eels as a foodstuff occurred in the post-famine period. Perhaps, the decline was related to diminishing stocks as the *Limerick Chronicle* reported in 1852 ‘at the prosecution of Mr Alton of the Limerick Board of Conservators, John McDonnell was fined 10s for setting a net on the eel weir in the river Maigue, during the annual close time’ (*Limerick Chronicle*, 17 July 1852). Subsequently, at a meeting of the Limerick Fishery Board 1898, the discussion centred on eel weir licences.

On the 4 February 1842, the *Freeman’s Journal* recalled a very destructive storm, which saw damage to multiple churches in the catchment, the destruction of Carrigounnell Castle and the lifting of a large stand of oats in Croom Castle.

1850-1900

Between 1850 and 1900, the majority of the newspaper coverage related to the fisheries and their abundance. The *Irish Examiner* reports ‘excellent accounts of good salmon fishing along the Maigue which was reported to be alive with good fishing: over seventy fish caught in two days’ in 1869¹. A 65 lb. salmon² features in 1875 and 420 lb. sturgeon³ in 1897. Fisheries management is also prominent in terms of enforcement of boundaries between tidal and freshwaters⁴ (and whether the waters were salmon fisheries or estuaries) (*Irish Examiner* 1864), while *no drift-nets be used in the Maigue or Deel, any infraction would lead to a £5 fine and forfeiture of nets* is reported in the *Tuam Herald* in 1874.⁵ Poaching is evident in a range of articles appearing in 1875, 1884 and 1894 with arrests for illegal fishing, assaults on a water bailiff and heavy handedness by said bailiffs. In 1898, three fisherman were accosted by a bailiff named ‘Madigan’.

¹ *Irish Examiner*, 6 April 1869.

² *Irish Examiner*, 29 April 1875.

³ *Irish Examiner*, 10 July 1897.

⁴ *Irish Examiner*, 28 March 1864.

⁵ *Tuam Herald*, 12 December 1874.

Injury and death feature on the Maigue; a visiting dentist on a fishing expedition fell from his boat and drowned along with a servant in a flooded Maigue in 1853. Other articles in this period include the drowning of a Catholic curate in 1875, a visit by Lord Randolph Churchill to Adare Manor in 1893 and the rescue of an Ordnance Surveyor from the river in 1889. On the 14 of September 1859, the *Munster News* carried an account of porpoise hunt at Adare. The porpoise was hunted as a 'destructive foe of the salmon' and the article recorded the '*destruction of two of the shoal... by local police officers in front of a crowd of three hundred spectators*'. Further fisheries management is evident with a redefinition of the river mouth in 1895 and a fishery bye-law which reduced the statutory limit of nets from 43 yards to 39 yards in 1897.

1900-1950

A more diverse range of Maigue related topics including access, floods, drainage, in addition to the fisheries feature in newspapers between 1900 and 1950. A report in the *Limerick Leader* noted that Adare is '*accessible by road, rail or river for the estuary of the Maigue is navigable up to the town by means of a short canal and there are two quays, one at the town and a second one a mile further down river*' (*Limerick Leader*, 20 July 1925). Earlier in the century, sporting access across the river was curtailed following the collapse of an unidentified wooden bridge over the Maigue in 1912. The *Whitby Gazette* reported that a '*whilst some members of the County Limerick Foxhounds were crossing an old wooden structure, it collapsed and they were precipitated into the water, and carried away by the flood.*' The horses and riders were swept some distance downstream before they could regain the bank. The danger of crossing rivers when in flood was additionally shown by the death of a Mr. McCormack, a whipper with the Limerick hounds⁶. In 1922, during the War of Independence, the Maigue was reported as being of strategic importance as noted by General O'Duffy: '*we have cleared east and mid-Limerick from the Maigue River to the Tipperary border.*'⁷ Flooding of lands in and around the Maigue is reported in 1929, 1932 and 1946 with homes abandoned. A 1928 proposed drainage scheme for County Limerick and a contribution towards the cost of the Rivers Maigue and Loobagh drainage also features. By 1929, Limerick County Council had spent £20,000 on river drainage works. In 1934, the *Irish Times* reported

⁶ *Whitby Gazette*, 4 January 1912.

⁷ *Irish Times*, 5 August 1922.

on the Maigue embankment case, which centered on a dispute between two prominent landowners over the allocation of a £6,000 fund for the upkeep and maintenance of certain embankments abutting the River Maigue. In 1930, the *Limerick Leader* was first to reference to pollution when it called for '*urgent repairs of local sewerage system sought* are sought for Croom due to the *risk of potential poisoning of livestock*'.

The work of the Fishery Conservators progresses in this period with new bye-laws on access enacted in 1912. However, the fishermen are not happy and a public demonstration in support of fisherman rights along the Maigue is reported in the *Limerick Leader* in 1911. The first concerns about a decline in the fishery is also evident with *low numbers of salmon being caught* (1929), total numbers of salmon caught on the Maigue in Adare Manor so far this season was 108, weighing from 27.5lbs down (1931).

In 1946, the *Irish Examiner* described the heaviest rainfall in years, with a swollen Maigue overflowing its banks, inundating the railway line between Cork and Limerick with many hundreds of sleepers stripped.

1950+

Post 1950 drainage activity on the Maigue is the most frequently reported topic. Further expenditure of £10,000 by Limerick County Council and dredging of the channel are reported in 1951. By 1970, the drainage works have become contentious with a scheme for Maigue drainage declared invalid. By 1976, farmers blocked a £6m drainage scheme, their dispute centered on reassurance that the scheme would be extended for one mile upstream, claiming that extensive flooding would be caused in the lower regions otherwise. Issues about drainage culminated in the Commissioners for Public Works producing a booklet explaining their approach to arterial drainage in 1979.

Porpoises are described as having invaded the Maigue river in March 1952 (*Limerick Leader*), presumably in pursuit of salmon and other fish causing outrage amongst the local fishermen. One of these monster porpoises was subsequently shot by marksman Mr. Thomas Morrow providing a spectacle for day trippers to Ferrybridge in April (*Limerick Leader*) In the fisheries inspectors report 182 salmon were caught in the Maigue in April 1952 and a further 40 by net

in the Shannon. By 1955 these numbers were greatly reduced to 40 in the Maigue and 15 in the estuary (Limerick Leader May 21 1955). Banning of threadline or spin fishing (spin fishing uses heavier lures normally imitating fish; primarily practiced on still water) of brown trout on the Maigue occurs in 1954, while a 35 lb salmon was caught in 1962. Pollution features in 1964 when thousands of fish die in Maigue due to an industrial pollutant and in 1972 *Undertakings in pollution claim: Affidavit challenged*. Sick salmon feature in 1970 and 1972 a clear symptom that not all is right in the Maigue. The post 1950 period starts with a reference to the Maigue as an asset, however, by 1976 '*wasting an asset*' is the topic of a letter by a concerned angler to the *Irish Times*. The letter described pollution in the Maigue, noting that '*at least three times in the last ten years, the River Maigue has been polluted by effluent from creameries in the Golden Vale itself.*' The 1970s also sees the social and environmental history of the Maigue being celebrated in Donal Mor O'Brien and the castles on the Maigue River and Croom honours poets of the Maigue River Valley.

Property Sales

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, national and local newspapers contained several accounts of large country estates for sale in the area around the Maigue – the plentiful supply of salmon and trout was always noted. Among those sales are Richview Mansion (Charleville) in 1877, Bruree Lodge in 1888, Drewscourt House (Charleville), Glenbevan House and lands in 1920, and Woodfield House and lands (Dromcollogher) in 1931. Sales of a more agrarian nature are also evident with large farms for sale boasting of a never failing supply of water from the Maigue. Examples include Anhid farm and house near Croom (1889) and an important sale of grasslands comprising parts of the lands at Athlacca and Glenma in the Barony of Coshma (1895), an auction of a dairy farm at Gurrane, near Charleville (1899), Knockfinora Farm and splendid cottage, bounded on the west by the River Maigue (1912), and the sale of lands bounded by the River Maigue located at Inchinclare, Rosstemple and Croom. The sale of Carass House and out-offices in 1923 notes the additional benefit of its weir across the Maigue which gives an annual rent of £5.

The Maigue View Hotel in Main Street Croom is illustrated in the OS Historic 25" map excerpt c.1900 (Figure 9). The hotel was operated by the Halpin family. The family are recorded in the 1911 Census (Figure 10). Present were six individuals, three Halpins (father, wife and son)

as well as three servants (one male and two female). The oldest individual was 50 and the youngest 6. Master J. Halpin of the Maigue View Hotel was recorded as a competition winner in the *Irish Times*, 9 September 1916. Even though the hotel is long since closed, the Halpin family still operate a public house in the same premises.

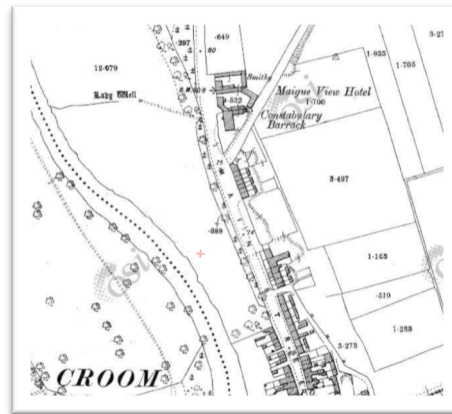


Figure 9: Maigue View Hotel in Main Street Croom is illustrated in the OS Historic 25" map excerpt

| NAME AND SURNAME | SEX | AGE | MARITAL STATUS | RELIGION | BIRTHPLACE |
|------------------|--------|-----|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| Master J. Halpin | Male | 50 | Married | Roman Catholic | County Wick |
| Miss J. Halpin | Female | 32 | Married | Roman Catholic | County Wick |
| John J. Halpin | Male | 6 | Single | Roman Catholic | County Wick |
| Miss J. Halpin | Female | 3 | Single | Roman Catholic | County Wick |
| Miss J. Halpin | Female | 3 | Single | Roman Catholic | County Wick |
| Miss J. Halpin | Female | 3 | Single | Roman Catholic | County Wick |

Figure 10: 1911 Census: Household Return (Form A)

Conclusion

The material included here represents just a sample of archaeological, topographic, archival and published sources. The Maigue Rivers Trust plan on building on this first report to provide a more comprehensive overview of the nature of human interactions with and influences of, the river Maigue through time.

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