

CLOONCURREEN CASTLE

Caisleán Chluain Currín

Clooncurreen Castle, a tower house similar in structure to the one in the illustration, was erected on the elevated site in view in the fifteenth or sixteenth century by a collateral branch of the Ó Mainnín or Mannion clan. The townland of Clooncurreen, after which it was named, consisted of two quarters of land, Carrowferrikeen and Carroleagh, with the castle having been built in the latter. Recorded as ‘Cloyncoryn’ in a survey of castles and their owners in late Tudor Connacht carried out in 1574, the ‘gentleman’ in possession of the castle at the time was ‘Dermot Omany’.

An entry in the Annals of Loch Cé under the year 1581 informs us that a Diarmuid Ó Mainnín, in all likelihood the aforementioned ‘Dermot’, was killed in a bitter quarrel involving rival segments of the neighbouring O’Kelly clan. Shortly afterwards, Diarmuid’s sons Tadhg and Seán were named as parties to a Brehon law agreement between two branches of the Ó Mainnín clan, drawn up in May 1584 by a MacEgan lawyer at the ceremonial hilltop site of Ramore in the nearby townland of Mullaghmore West.

Through sale, mortgage, and forfeiture in the wake of the Nine Years War, the Clooncurreen branch of the Ó Mainnín clan gradually lost the greater part of their possessions in the immediate area. By 1617, for example, half of the quarter of Carrowferrikeen was held by Sir John Burke of DerrymacLaughna, near Turloughmore in County Galway. At the same time, the remainder of Carrowferrikeen, together with Clooncurreen Castle and half of Carroleagh quarter, was in the hands of Richard Scurlock of Ahenny in County Mayo, who had served as sheriff of County Clare in 1599.

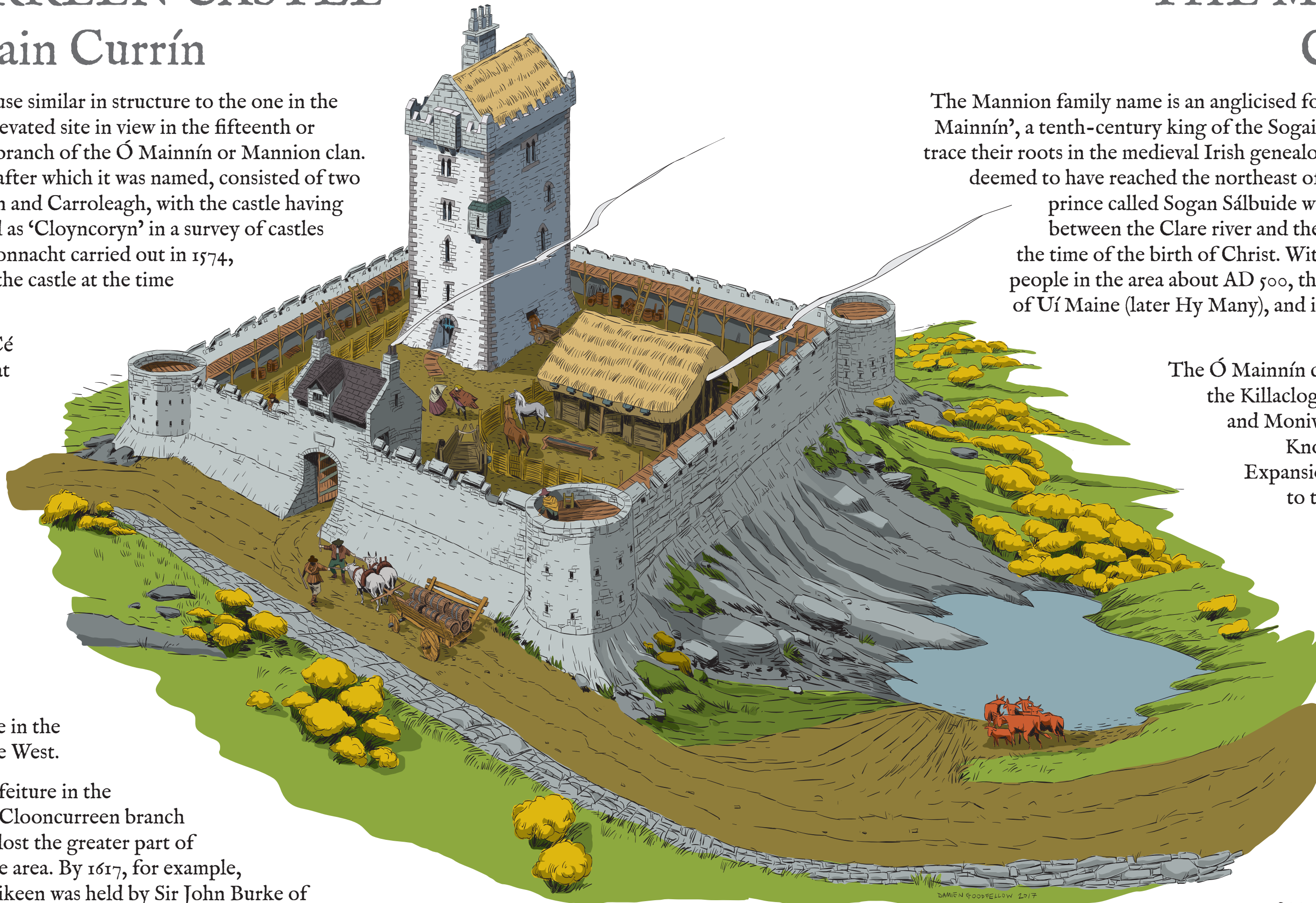
A tradition recorded in the early nineteenth century claims that Clooncurreen Castle was partly destroyed by Cromwellian forces about the middle of the seventeenth century. Today, only the grassed-over footprint of this late medieval fortified residence survives, around which large blocks of masonry, formerly part of the original structure, are randomly scattered. A gently rising sunken roadway, showing traces of dry stone revetments, afforded the Ó Mainnín occupants of the castle and their successors ease of access from the southwest. The pond in the foreground would have acted as a water source for horses and other animals belonging to the castle’s residents.

This project has been sponsored and funded by the Skehana & District Heritage Group and we gratefully acknowledge the assistance and support of our partners.

www.skehanaheritage.com, ✉ skehanaheritage@gmail.com, 📱 [skehanaheritage.com/skehanaheritage](https://www.facebook.com/skehanaheritage)

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Graphic Design & Illustration: Damien Goodfellow 2017, **Tower House Illustration:** Rory O’Shaughnessy 2012.



THE MANNION CLAN

Clann Uí Mhainnín

The Mannion family name is an anglicised form of Ó Mainnín, signifying ‘descendant of Mainnín’, a tenth-century king of the Sogain people of East Galway. The Mannions can trace their roots in the medieval Irish genealogies to the Cruthin, an early band of settlers deemed to have reached the northeast of Ireland about 600 BC. A descendant Ulster prince called Sogan Sálbuide was reputedly granted a territory in Connacht between the Clare river and the Suck by the legendary Queen Medb, about the time of the birth of Christ. With the arrival of the more powerful Uí Maine people in the area about AD 500, the kingdom of Sogan became a sub-kingdom of Uí Maine (later Hy Many), and its Sogain inhabitants were obliged to render tribute and military service to them.

The Ó Mainnín clan originally dwelt to the west and south of the Killaclogher-Abbert river, in the parishes of Athenry and Monivea and the parts of Lackagh, Kilmoylan and Knockmoy that lie to the east of the Clare river. Expansion by the Uí Briúin people of Mag Seóla led to the loss of the Ó Mainnín lands in Kilmoylan and Lackagh, while Athenry was lost to the Clann Taidg sept, who were relatives of the O’Connor kings of Connacht, by the mid-twelfth century. About the middle of the fourteenth century, the O’Kellys of Hy Many captured the Ó Mainnín stronghold at Killaclogher in the parish of Monivea, deprived the clan of their hereditary lands, hanged the Ó Mainnín chieftain, and forced his kinsmen eastwards over the Killaclogher river. Here they repossessed former Sogain lands, occupied by the Uí Diarmada and their O’Concannon descendants since about AD 900. In the late sixteenth century, they held most of the parish of Killoscobe, the central part of Moylough, and two townlands in Knockmoy.

After their relocation, the ruling branch of the Ó Mainnín clan established their centre of power at Mionlach Uí Mhainnín, now Menlough, where they erected a substantial castle with a bawn and associated medieval village in the fifteenth or sixteenth century. A collateral branch of the family seemingly erected another castle at Clooncurreen about the same time. Ó Mainnín landholders continued to hold much of their newly acquired territory until the mid-seventeenth-century Cromwellian confiscations, at which time they were dispossessed and dispersed, with just small portions of the clan lands being restored to its former owners during the Restoration under Charles II (1660-1685). To this day, the Mannion clan continues to be strongly represented in the East Galway area.



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