

Rural Change in the Co. Armagh Townland of Lissummon

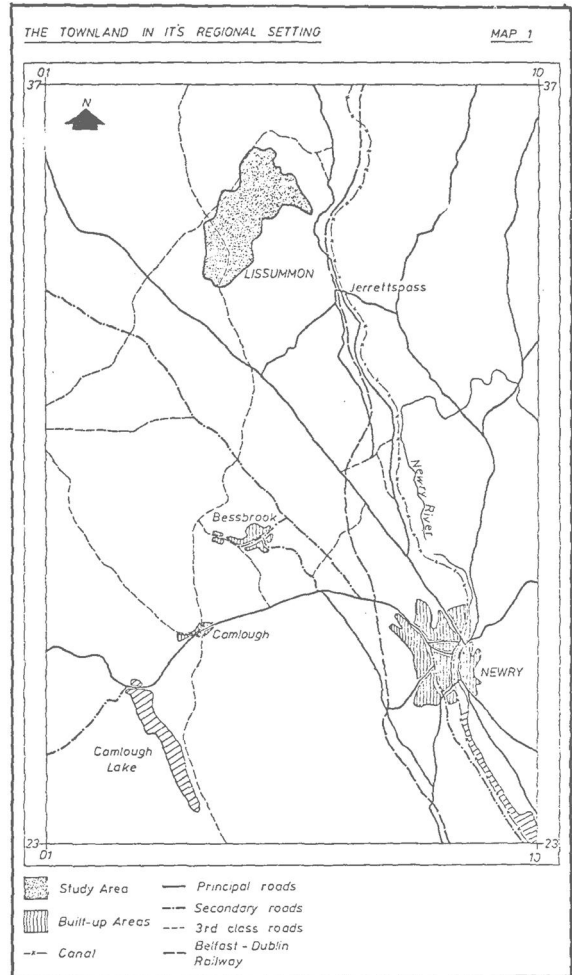
1784 to the present day

By MARY GOSS

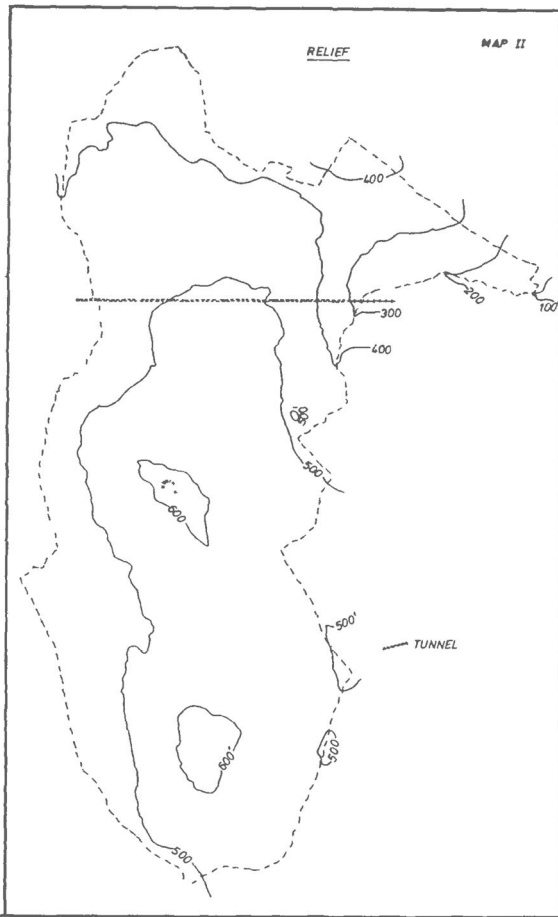
In common with every native of Lissummon I have a tremendous interest in and loyalty to the area. I cannot expect every reader of this article to share that same enthusiasm but perhaps the methods used here and the amateur detective work I have employed will encourage a few others to examine an area they already know and love in a little more detail.

“Lissummon” generally is perceived as a large area served by the Catholic Church and Primary School which bear its name. My study is confined solely to the townland of Lissummon and interestingly neither the school nor the church mentioned are within the townland area! The position of the townland is seen on Map 1. Lying just five miles north of Newry between the main Tandragee and Armagh roads, Lissummon should be easily accessible and attractive for settlement. The local effects of relief are however considerable. The contour map (Map II) provided reveals a very steep slope on the Eastern side, and it is in this part of the townland that we find a large number of abandoned houses. In addition to “vacant dwellings” there are two other settlement types in the present day landscape: farmhouses; and detached houses unconnected with farming. The former are dispersed in pattern, being generally centrally positioned on their holdings, the latter tend to be strung in linear fashion along the Newry to Poyntzpass road in the South-West. Map III shows the situation which existed in 1974 and residents of the area may be interested to note changes which have taken place since then.

We can often set out on our search for evidence of everyday life in the past without any certain idea of how far back we can go. Occasionally some unexpected piece of information emerges which will serve as a stable foundation upon which to build up subsequent layers. In this case the discovery of an excellent survey of the Moore estate executed in



1784 provided a good starting point. The map is sufficiently accurate to allow close comparison with the first Ordnance Survey of 1834. The farm patterns in the townlands can be easily compared with those on later valuation maps, and, although acreages are not comparable, we can, from surname evidence, identify some of the farms subsequently referred to. (The information from 1784 has been



transferred to the 1834 O.S. Map outline in Map IV).

Early in the 1800's the Moore estate changed hands, as a result of the failure of the Newry Bank in which John Moore had been a partner. In reference to the failure of the Bank, Stuart's Historical Memoirs of Armagh says:

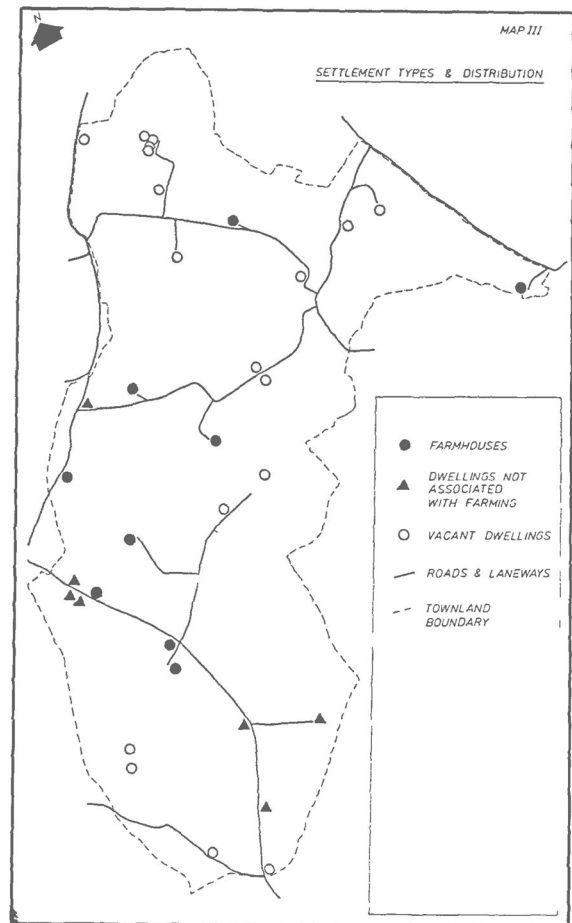
“In consequence of this failure the Drumbanagher property had to be sold and came to the hands of the Close family”.

The new owners, anxious to know exactly what they had purchased, had the estate thoroughly surveyed in 1820. The resulting document gives a vivid and detailed picture of life in each townland.

From a study of those sections relating to Lissummon, we can glean several valuable facts which fill in some of the gaps between 1784 and the census of 1841. Unfortunately, the map which accompanied the survey cannot be traced, but the information may be related, to some extent, with

the 1784 and later maps again on surname evidence.

In 1820, Lissummon had some forty landowning families with a total of ten Cottier families being supported on the farms. There is rarely more than one Cottier family per farm. From the details of farmers' families included, it is possible to compile a rough estimate of population. Unfortunately, complete accuracy is not possible, as reference was not made to the Cottiers wives and children. In calculating only farmers, their families, servant boys and servant girls we arrive at a total population of 234 which could easily reach 300 if the ten Cottier families were included. Twenty of the landowners were employed solely in agriculture, eighteen were also weavers, while one was a blacksmith and another a carpenter. Many of the farms were quite large but only two of the farmhouses had both thatched and slated sections in their roofing, most had only one room and were described by the surveyor as being “in bad repair”.



In some attempt to improve the living conditions of the people of the estate, the survey puts forward plans for improved cottages (seen here in figures 1. and 2) adding that grants of timber towards roofing would be made to those adopting the plans. The surveyor also comments on communications:

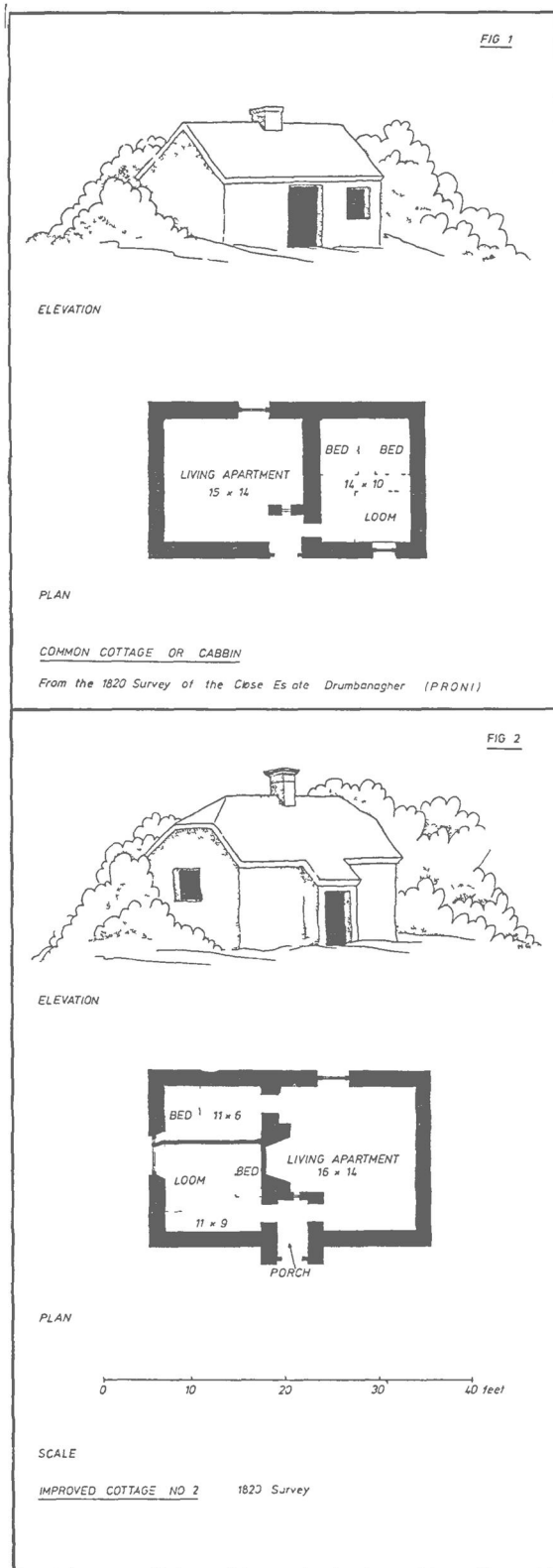
“The Chief inconvenience sustained by many of the tenantry on Drumbanagher Estate is the steep and inconvenient communication which the Bye roads and lanes, which intersect the lands, have with the level line of the road to Newry, which runs along the base of the hills”.

As was the case all over Ireland, the population continued to grow rapidly during the 1820’s and 1830’s, but there are few written documents relating to the Lissummon area between 1820 and the census of 1841. The first Ordnance Survey Map of 1834 (Map V) updates the road and settlement pattern of 1784. One new road had been added in the NE to serve the increased number of farmhouses in this area. In contrast other roads which were important in 1784, are, by 1834, already becoming of secondary importance or have completely disappeared.

A document dated Tuesday, August 2nd, 1836 gives a detailed description of some farmhouses and their outoffices and also includes the dimensions of the Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland Churches in the townland at this time. Both Churches were well established by then. There is no record of the exact date of erection of the Catholic Church but there is proof that “Lissummon had its Church in 1828”¹ The Church of Ireland building was much older, having been consecrated on May 22nd, 1731² The Churches were situated at the western and eastern extremities of the townland respectively, but would appear not to have had any effect on settlement patterns. (Since this time both places of worship have been replaced by more modern buildings, the Church of Ireland in 1861 and the Catholic Church in 1933. Both moved to new sites only a few yards away from the originals. As a result, they are now in neighbouring townlands and Lissummon no longer has a Church within its boundaries.)

1 Lower Killeavy — Ireland outlines of their History (1955) Rev Louis O Kane B.D.C.C (page 62)

2 From facts written on the inside cover of the Baptismal Register (PRON 1) Ref MIC/II



1820 SURVEY OF CLOSE ESTATE

Sample entry:—

William Finch | $\overset{A}{8}$ $\overset{R}{2}$ $\overset{P}{20}$ | 1 d. hse | 1 bn. | 1 byr. | 1 stab. |
THATCH & SLATE | 2 cows | 1 other cattle | 2 horses |
2 pigs | WEAVER | PROTESTANT | Aged 57 |
wife aged 54 | 7c. 4m. 3f. aged 11-27.

Hugh Murphy | $\overset{A}{6}$ $\overset{R}{0}$ $\overset{P}{35}$ | 1 rm. | 1 byr. | THATCH | 1 cow | WEAVER |
CATHOLIC | Aged 54 | wife aged 50 | 9c. 2m. 7f. |
aged 8 - 23 |
also $\overset{A}{3}$ $\overset{R}{3}$ $\overset{P}{35}$ (resident as above)

By 1841 the population of Lissummon had grown to 388 — these figures give a population density of 432 per square mile. In general this is high, but it must be remembered that Co. Armagh had the highest pre-famine population density in Ireland, with 511 persons per square mile of arable land. The famine of 1840's produced, throughout Ireland, radical changes in the way of life of remote, thickly populated rural communities. However we must be careful not to overstress the importance of this experience as a factor influencing rural change in this part of Co. Armagh, or indeed, in many parts of Ulster. The 1820 Survey, in discussing land-use, says:

“The entire lands are well adapted for the production of oats and excellent flax. The drier and warmer parts produce average crops of barley”.

There is no foundation for suggestions that the people here were entirely dependant upon the potato. There is no doubt that many elderly people, women and children did die as a result of famine here, but it should not be forgotten that it was also about this time that the home weaving industry began to decay. An observer wrote from Co. Armagh:

“The weaver at present (February 1847) can only earn 2s-6d to 4s-6d by weaving a web of 60 yards, which employs him a whole week in preparation; while at present prices such wages will not support the mere weaver without his family”³.

As a result of this decay many skilled weavers would have been forced to move either to the towns, where the mills and power looms were taking over,

or overseas to seek alternative employment. As Bessbrook Mill, just over 4 miles away to the South, opened in 1846, it is tempting to suppose that some of the weavers from Lissummon moved there. When the percentage fall in population for the 1841-1851 period is examined one thing is certainly clear — Lissummon suffered severe depopulation.

Percentage Losses in Population 1841-1851:

Ireland	20%
N. Ireland	12%
Co. Armagh	16%
Lissummon	29%

After 1851, the decline established in the famine period continued. The population graph (Figure 3) reveals the trend which emerged. Although the drop in population suffered in the 1840's is not repeated, there are other periods of considerable loss. As expected the drop in population is accompanied by a reduction in the number of inhabited houses. Presumably the majority of houses left vacant were soon demolished as the number of uninhabited houses does not rise accordingly.

3. “The Famine and its Consequences” Thomas P. O'Neill in “Ulster Since 1800” ed T. W. Moody & J. C. Beckett (1957) page 36.

During this post famine period of decline and depopulation, farm-sizes in Lissummon began to increase steadily, a feature common all over Ireland at this time. Although this had never been an area of small segmented holdings the larger farms of the late 18th and early 19th century expanded to include the land being vacated by their deceased and migrant neighbours. One good illustration exists in the case of a certain Charles Madden who in 1836 owned “about eleven English acres”⁴. and had increased his holding to just over eighty acres by 1865. At this time a sizeable influx of “outsiders” arrived in Lissummon with the commencement of work on the railway tunnel late in 1861. The decision to build the tunnel was made after unsuccessful discussions with the landlord, Colonel Close. It had been hoped that by building the railway through his demesne a tunnel would not have been necessary.

With the beginning of work on the tunnel, large parties of miners moved with their families to settle temporarily in the townland and surrounding area. The scant information still available from elderly residents suggests that these people were housed by the local farmers in spare rooms and outhouses. The

4. Parish of Killeavy, Co. Armagh, 1836 (P.R.O.N.I.) Ref. VAL.1B.217.

presence of these men, many from Lancashire and the English Midlands, must have gone some way towards changing, at least temporarily, the reserved life-style of many of the local people. One result of their presence was the opening of a thriving "shebeen" at the crossroads in the centre of the townland (at the bottom of what is called the "Forth Loanin"). As this was the only source of entertainment available to the miners there can be no doubt that for the duration of their stay this was the focal point of male social activity in the area. However, despite these lighthearted memories of the tunnel builders, it would appear that life for their wives and young families, in their inadequate, temporary accommodation was very difficult. In the Drumbanagher Parish Records, we can find entries for the burials of six young children listed as sons and daughters of the miners in 1863 alone.

In the Minutes of the Newry and Armagh Railway, the Engineer's Report of February, 1864 states:

"The Lissummon Tunnel, the great work of the line, has been successfully and satisfactorily constructed".

The miners, their families and any changes they had brought were soon forgotten. Despite their three year stay, none of the mine workers appears to have formed lasting ties with the area. The "shebeen" which had been their principal rendezvous, gradually lost its importance and the family who owned it, the Maddens, also died out; for that most Irish of reasons, failure to marry and produce children. By 1890 their 80 acre farm, by far the largest in the townland, had changed hands, and in 1901 it was divided into two units of 50 and 30 acres.

5. Drumbanagher Parish Records, Killeavy Parish (Church of Ireland) 1851-1890 (P.R.O.N.I.).

On examination we find that this failure to reproduce has been the root cause of much of the rural change in this area, with even large farms changing hands for this reason far into the present century.

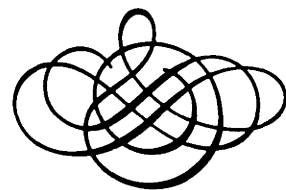
The overall improvement in living standards experienced in rural districts since the 1950's may have accelerated depopulation in parts of Lissummon. The electricity and mains water services had to be brought into the townland from the West, since the main Tandragee road to the East is some 500 feet below the level of most houses in eastern

Lissummon. The result was a tailing off of these services on the eastern side and it appears that even those couples who had sons and daughters to keep on the house and farm, failed to succeed in attracting the young people and their farms have suffered the same fate as the holdings of their neighbours who did not marry and produce a family.

The early 1970's saw the building of a small number of new houses on the main Newry — Poyntzpass road in the west — no doubt encouraged by the access to electricity, water and telephone services and the relative ease with which the surrounding areas could be reached via the main road network.

An examination of population in the mid 1970's revealed a bleak prospect. There were 61 people living in Lissummon, only 31% of these were aged 19 and under. The population was aging rapidly. In 1983 a similar examination gave a total population of 63, but the population structure showed a hopeful change. 48% were aged 0-19 years, 41% were between 20 and 60 years and only 11% were 60 years and over.

The area has always been well-loved by those who have family ties there. If planning permission permits, a growing number of these young people may manage to stay on and perhaps some whose parents were forced to leave may have a chance to drift back. It is even possible that, with the late twentieth century trend of moving away from built-up areas, the more remote eastern area, with its matchless 180° view of County Down, will also develop an attraction once again.



APPENDICES

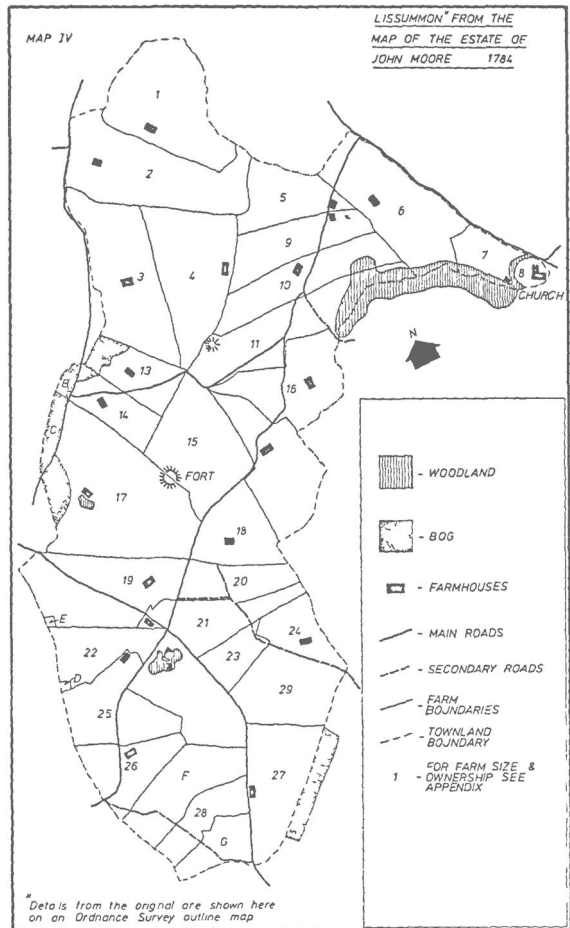
APPENDIX 1: Land owners and their acreages from the Map of the Estate of John Moore, Drumbanagher, surveyed in 1784 by Robt. Bell.



(Numbers refer to Map IV)

Map No.		A.	R.	P.
1	David Henry	21	1	04
2	James Henry	23	1	07
3	John Williamson	20	3	27
4	William Minnis	21	0	02
5	Charles Looe	11	1	25
6	Patrick Pherson	21	1	12
7	Richard Heazly (Beyond Canal	R. 3	P. 10)	
		7	1	37
8	Churchyard	0	2	16
9	Terence Looe	11	1	20
10	Widow McCourt	13	2	10
11	Bryan Meghan*			
12	Michael McCafery	17	0	02
13	Darby Meghan	A. 7	P. 2	R. 13
	(Bog adjoining at A)	1	3	23
14	Patr'k McKeoin (inc. bog at B	1	2	0)
		9	0	12
15	Bryan Doarin	31	2	13
16	Hugh McKeoin	13	0	28
17	Henry Savage	33	0	7
	(Ditto Bog at C)	3	2	12
18	Robert Linn	10	3	26
19	Michael O'Hare and including Toaner	19	2	10
20	Patrick McShane	7	3	17
21	Francis Jennings (inc. meadow at E)	14	3	27
22	Charles Jennings	26	0	24
23	Bryan Murphy	4	3	35
24	John Looe	7	0	01
25	Anthony Jennings and Pat McClorey	14	2	00
26	George Jennings (inc. meadow at D)	R. 1		
		9	2	10
27	John and James McLure (inc. F and G)	34	0	19
28	John McAndless	6	1	27
29	Daniel McShane	13	3	36
TOTAL:		444	0	20

Acreages shown are probably a mixture of Irish and Scotch measurements
 1 Irish or Plantation acre = 1.62 statute acres
 1 Cunningham or Scotch acre = 1.29 statute acres
 * Acreage obliterated



APPENDIX 2:

**1820 — SURVEY OF THE
CLOSE ESTATE**

Surnames of Landowners

* BELL	LINN	MEIGHAN
* BELL	* LYNCH	* MORGAN
* DEVELIH	* MADDEN	MURPHY
DORAN	* McALEAVEY	MURPHY
DORAN	* McBRIDE	O'HEAR
FARSON	* McCONVELL	O'HEAR
* FINCH	McCOURT	O'HEAR
* FINCH	McCOURT	O'HEAR
* FITZPATRICK	McCOURT	* RICE
* GUY	McCANDLESS	* PATTEN
HENRY	McCLURE	SAVAGE
HENRY	McCLURE	* SMITH
HENRY	McCAVERY	* THOMPSON
HENRY	McCAVERY	* TONER
JENNINGS	McQUEON	* WALKER
JENNINGS	McQUEON	WILLIAMSON
JENNINGS	McQUEON	WILLIAMSON
JENNINGS	McSHANE	* HAGAN
LOO	MEIGHAN	HEAZLY
LOO	MEIGHAN	

Only two Surnames have disappeared since 1784.
MINNIS & McCLOREY

* New since 1784.

APPENDIX 3: 1865 Land Valuation,

Union of Newry: Co. Armagh

(P.R.O.N.I.)

(Numbers refer to Map VI)

Map No.		A.	R.	P.
1	James Finch; House, Offices, land	21	0	0
2a	Andrew Collins; House, Offices, land	15	3	32
2b	Daniel Madden; House, Offices, land			
3a	Joseph O'Hagan	23	2	20
4		11	2	23
3b	Unoccupied; House			
5	James Smith; House, Offices, land	4	3	28
6a	John Murphy snr; House, Offices, land	8	2	16
6b	Michael Sheridan; House			
7a	Bernard Harris; House, Offices, land	16	1	36
7b	John Thompson; House and garden	0	0	15
8a	William Finch; House, Offices, land	14	0	0
8b	John Burns; House			
9a	Newry and Armagh land	5	2	3
9b	Railway Company land	1	3	21
9c	(Benj. L. Fearnley, Secretary) Railway	1	2	0
9Ac	Thomas Ellis; House			
10	John Murphy jun.; Land	8	3	6
10a	Peter Burns; House and small garden			
11	Land	14	3	30
	Hugh McCaffrey			
12	House, Offices, land	17	1	12
13	Henry McCaffrey; House, Offices, land	11	2	38

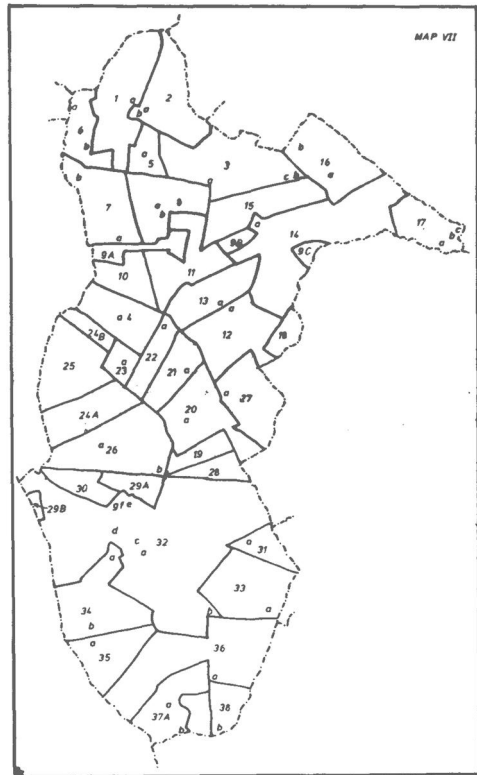
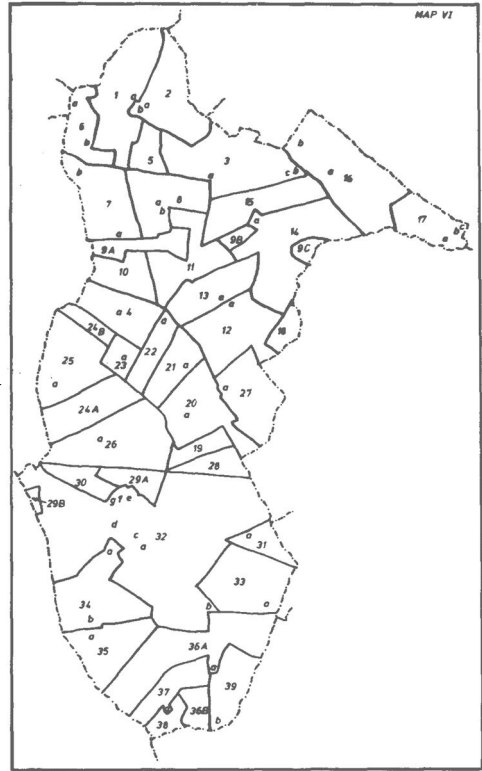
14	Thomas O'Hagan; House, Offices, land	23	0	16
15	John Lynch; Land	14	0	29
15a	Samuel Boyd; House			
16a	Michael Callaghan; House, Offices, land	26	3	38
16b	Bridget Collins; House and garden	0	0	20
17a	David Sterritt; House, Offices, land	8	2	16
17b	Graveyard			
17c	Maxwell Close; Office			
18		3	3	32
	Edward O'Hare; Land			
19		4	2	22
20	Peter Doran; House, Offices, land	16	2	32
21	Robt. Finch; House, Offices, land	8	1	5
22	Thomas Finch; House, Offices, land	6	3	5
23	John Tole; House, Offices, land	3	3	12
24Aa		12	0	8
	William McKeown; House, Offices, land			
24B		3	1	32
24Ba	George Lawrence; House			
24Bb	John Grattan; House			
25	James Mooney; House, Offices, land	16	2	2
26a	James McCourt; House, Offices, land	21	2	10
26b	Unoccupied; House			
27	Maria Doran; House, Offices, land	13	2	9
28		5	0	13
29Aa	Bernard Toner; House, Offices, land	5	0	23
29B		0	3	10
30	James Toner; House, Offices, land	6	0	24
31	Nicholas McKenna; House Offices, land	5	1	13
32a	Charles Madden; House, Offices, land	80	3	37
32b	William Moan; House and garden	0	0	30
32d	James Boyle; House			
32e	Ellen Savage; House			
32f	Hugh McElery; House and garden	0	0	30
	Dav'd Rice; House, Offices, land			
33		17	3	13
	James Rice; Land			
34a	Daniel Jennings; House, Office, land	18	0	10
34b	Daniel McEvoy; House and garden	0	0	15
35	Land	12	0	8
	Bernard Madden;			
	House			
32c				
35a	Daniel Carr; House			
36Aa		26	0	10
	James Thompson; House, Offices, land			
36B		4	1	2
36b	James Bell; House and garden	0	0	15
37a	James McCandleless; House, Office, land	8	2	16
38a	Anne McClure; House, Office, land	3	3	22
39a	John Shields; House, Offices, land	8	3	26
39b	R.C. Chapel, graveyard and National School house			

**APPENDIX 4: Land Valuation 1895. Details
compiled from General Valuation of
Ireland. D.E.D.**

Poyntzpass: late 1860s to 1920 (5 vols.) P.R.O.N.I.

Map No.	(Map VII)	A.	R.	P.
1a	William J. Finch; House, offices, land	20	3	30
1b	William J. Finch; Outoffices			
2a	Agnes Collins; House, offices, land			
2b	Bernard Madden; House, offices, land	15	3	25
3a	Joseph O'Hagan; House, offices, land	23	2	5
4a	Reps. of John Meehan; House, offices land	11	2	20
6	Michael Murphy; House, offices, land	8	2	10
5	James Smith; House, offices, land	4	3	25
6b	House vacant 1874			

7a	Eliza Catherine Harris; House, offices, land	16 . 1 . 30
7b	Eliza Catherine Harris; House and garden	0 . 0 . 15
8a	Wm. Jas. Finch Jnr; House, offices, land	13 . 3 . 35
8b	Wm. Jas. Finch Jnr; Vacant house and land	4 . 1 . 25
9A	Land	5 . 2 . 0
9B	Great Northern Railway;	1 . 3 . 20
9C		1 . 2 . 0
9Aa	House down in 1886	
10	John Murphy Jnr; Land	8 . 3 . 0
10a	House vacant 1887	
11	Hugh McCaffery; Land	14 . 3 . 25
12	Hugh McCaffery; House, offices, land	17 . 1 . 5
13	Hugh McCaffery Jnr; House, offices, land	11 . 2 . 35
14	Thomas O'Hagan; House, offices, land	36 . 2 . 28
15	John Lynch; House, land	7 . 2 . 20
16a	Charles O'Hagan; vac. house, offices, land	17 . 0 . 12
16b	House down in 1870	
17	George Sterritt; House, offices, land	8 . 2 . 10
17b	Graveyard	
17c	Maxwell Close; Office	
18	John O'Hare; Land	3 . 3 . 30
19		4 . 2 . 20
20	Reps. of Bridget Doran; House, offices, land	16 . 2 . 25
21	William Finch; House, offices, land	8 . 1 . 0
22	Henry Close; House, offices, land	6 . 3 . 0
23	Michael McCourt; House, offices, land	3 . 3 . 10
24Aa		12 . 0 . 5
	Jacob Bittles Jun.; House, offices, land	
24B		3 . 1 . 30
24Ba	House vacant 1892	
25	James Mooney; House, offices, land	16 . 1 . 35
26a	Charles Rafferty; House, offices, land	21 . 2 . 5
26b	House down in 1871	
27	Agnes Doran; House, offices, land	13 . 2 . 5
28		5 . 0 . 10
29Aa	James Toner upper Jnr; House, offices, land	5 . 0 . 20
29B		0 . 3 . 10
30	James Toner Snr; House, offices, land	6 . 0 . 20
31	Reps. of John Henry; offices, land	5 . 1 . 10
32a	Reps. of Chas. Madden; House, offices, land	83 . 3 . 20
32b	House down 1887	
32c	" " "	
32d	" " "	
32e	" " "	
32f	" " "	
33	David Rice; House, offices, land	17 . 3 . 5
34Ba	Offices, land	15 . 1 . 15
	Felix O'Hagan	
35	Land	12 . 0 . 5
34Bb	House down 1891	
35a	Henry Campbell; House	
36	Nathaniel Henry; House, offices, land	29 . 3 . 35
37a	House, offices, land	12 . 1 . 35
	John Clarke;	
37b	House	
38Aa		2 . 2 . 0
	Nathaniel Henry;	
38B		2 . 1 . 0
38b	R. C. Church, graveyard and school	



APPENDIX 5: Second General Valuation of Northern Ireland 1956
D.E.D. Drumbanagher (P.R.O.N.I.)

Map No. (Map VIII)	A.	R.	P.
1ab J. E. Ewart; Offices, land	20	3	30
2c Annie Rafferty; Offices, land			
2b Henry Donnelly; Offices, land	15	3	25
3a Jane O'Hagan; House, offices, land	24	1	5
4a Margaret Murphy; House, offices, land	11	2	20
5a J. Smith; House, offices, land	4	3	25
6a J. Thomas; House, offices, land	5	2	10
7a J. O'Brien; Offices, land	16	2	5
8AaB W. H. Finch, House, offices, land	18	1	20
9a Margaret Murphy; Land	2	0	0
9b Elizabeth Jane O'Hagan; House, offices			
14a Elizabeth Jane O'Hagan; Land	37	3	28
9c G.N.R.; disused			
10a Margaret Murphy; Offices, land	9	0	10
11 P. McCaffery; House, offices, land	34	0	20
12a H. McCaffery; House, offices, land	11	2	35
13a S. A. Shevlin; House, offices, land	7	2	20
16a P. Murphy; House, offices, land	17	0	12
17a George Sterritt; House, offices, land	8	1	30
17b Graveyard			
18 Kathleen O'Brien; Land	3	3	28
19 F. Rafferty; Land	4	2	22
20a Annie J. Rafferty; House, offices, land	16	2	25
21a Emily J. Clulow; House, offices, land	8	1	0
22a Emily J. Clulow; Offices, land	6	3	0
23a J. McCaffery; Offices, land	3	3	10
24AaB H. Ewart; Offices, land	15	1	35
25Aa House, offices, land	11	1	15
J. Carty; Land	5	0	20
25B Land			
26a P. Rafferty; House, offices, land	21	2	5
27a P. McCaffery; Offices, land	13	2	5
28 J. McCaffery snr.; Offices, land	11	0	0
29AaB F. Rafferty; Land	6	0	20
30a I.N.F. Hall			
30b F. Rafferty; House and garden	5	1	10
31 G. McCartney; Land	49	2	0
32Aa G. McCartney; House, offices, land	30	3	20
32Bab J. McCaffery snr.; House, offices, land	2	2	0
32c J. Rice; Land	0	2	0
32Da J. Duffy; Labourers cottage and land	0	2	0
32Ea Dan Harte; Labourers cottage and land	17	3	5
33a J. Rice; House, offices, land			
34 J. Ferris; Land	27	1	20
35 T. Acheson; House, offices, land	29	3	35
37AabB T. Acheson; Offices, land	16	3	35
38 Nathaniel Henry jnr.; Land	4	3	0
38b P. O'Hare; House*, offices, yard			

* This house was formerly the school.

