

The Mac Egans of Duniry

The MacEgans belonged originally to the family groups of Hy Many having common ancestry with the O'Kellys, O'Maddens, O'Naughtens and a host of others, all tracing their ancestry from Maine Mor. However, by reason of the profession of law, which they adopted in the 14th century or before they became scattered in various territories throughout the land, teaching and administering the Brehon Law.

After the Norman Conquest part of the Hy Many became de Burgo territory and when Norman institutions collapsed in the 14th century, the de Burgos adopted Brehon law with reservations. Thus a branch of the Mac Egans, the clann Diarmada, became ollavs and brehons to the Clauricard Burkes and were known as Ollamhain Cloinne Riocaird. They were seated at Duniry between Portumna and Loughrea and had a law school there, certainly in the fifteenth century. Carbre Mac Egan and 'ye brehons' occupied the castle of Clonecastle alongside Duniry in 1759. Two important medieval manuscript compilations are associated with the School of Duniry.

The Leabhar Breac and the oldest fragments of the Senchas Mor. The former, also known as Leabhar Mor Duna Doighre is our greatest repertory of ecclesiastical lore. The latter was written probably by Conor Mac Egan at Duniry in the early 14th century and was still there in 1575, while the Leabhar Breach was in the vicinity, in the Abbey of Kilnalahan as late as 1629. Many of the Mac Egans were then scattered, traditionally as a result of their complicity in the O'Neill Rebellion. Some remained, however, and Nehemias Egan is recorded as having a "freehold in Duniry" in 1608 and in 1780 Carbery Egan held a farm from Clanricard in Kylegan, part of a townland adjoining Duniry. With the signing of the Composition of Connaught in 1585 the MacEgan's found their profession coming to an end. Only the commanding site of their castle still remains.

The Birds of the Forest of Wisdom: The MacEgans contributed three poems to an old book of Irish poems called "The contention of the Bards". In one of these poems Anluan MacEgan addressed the MacEgan clan as "the birds of the Forest of Wisdom". It is for this reason that we have adopted the birds as our emblem for our present documentation.

CLONMACNOIS (Co. Offaly)

Clonmacnois is the remains of an early monastery founded by St. Ciaran around the year 545 where a major east-west roadway crossed the Shannon. At this great centre of learning and the arts in mediaeval times, there still survive six churches, two high crosses, two round towers and the finest collection of old Irish gravestones in the country. Its importance was underlined by the fact that it was the only Irish monastery which Pope John Paul II visited during his stay in Ireland in 1979.

CLONFERT CATHEDRAL (Co. Galway)

Founded in 563 by St. Brendan, the present 12th century church has perhaps the finest and most detailed example of a doorway in the Irish Romanesque style.

ROSCREA (Co. Tipperary)

Damer House

Damer House is a fine early Georgian residence built within the curtain walls of Roscrea Castle. The centrepiece of the house is a magnificently carved pine staircase, expertly restored, and an example of the best of 18th century and modern craftsmanship.

Damer House contains the fine collection of the Irish Country Furniture Society supplemented by pieces from the National Museum. This is the largest exhibition of traditional furniture in the country. Further exhibitions and crafts shop.

Roscrea Heritage Centre is attached to Damer House and is open to the public.

St. Cronan's Monastery

This is unique in that the main Limerick/Dublin road divides it in two, leaving the round tower to the west and the remains of the cathedral church - the west gable - and high cross to the east.

