

Prepared for the 2000 Egan Clan Rally.
Comments and corrections welcomed.

The Eigans from Park Castle

William F. Egan¹, June 11, 2000

“One of the most famous bardic schools of the Mac Eigans, and probably their original home, was at Park castle between Tuam and Glenamaddy in Co. Galway.”² We set out to find Park Castle after the last clan meeting four years ago. We had an Ordnance Survey Map showing its location and keyed on Kiltullagh Loch, which we could find on a road map, and adjacent roads. But first we went to nearby Clonbern.

Clonbern

The Eigans had a renowned school of brehon law at Park Castle but they were ejected from there by the English in the 17th century. They moved a few miles to an area known as Dunblaney, where they maintained a prosperous existence in spite of the suppression of brehon law. At the Egan clan gathering in 1996, John J. Egan had told us how to find the tomb of some of the Dunblaney Eigans, and the directions started at Clonbern. Moreover, we had met Jarlath Canney in the Irish Tourist Office (“the Mill Museum”) in Tuam and he had given us another reason to go to Clonbern. Jarlath is a member of the Old Tuam Society and bears the name of the founder of Tuam, St. Jarlath (the founding is an interesting tale). He told us that the date stone from Park Castle had been embedded in the wall of a school at Clonbern.

We began in Clonbern, as instructed, at a building that housed a nursery and a pub and got directions from someone there. The school was up high, across the road and to the left as we left that nursery. The cemetery containing the Egan tomb is down the road in the opposite direction. Figure 1 shows the date stone in the middle of the school wall. It was hard to get a clear photo of the stone, which is behind glass, but its description, from a plaque on the wall, is given below the photograph.

Then we found the cemetery that contains the Egan tomb. The tomb is shown in Fig. 2 and its inscription in Fig. 3. The inscription is badly mauled with corrections. Perhaps the creator of the inscription was not very familiar with the English language. The intended meaning may be: “This vault by the direction of John and Patrick Egan and the representatives of James Egan, Sr. is erected for the remains of the family of John and James Egan of Dunblaney in the year of our Lord 1806.” The familiar Egan crest appears in the lower right. Fig. 4 shows a similar crest on a signet ring that I inherited.

Archbishop Boetius Egan

One renowned member of the family at Dunblaney was the Archbishop of Tuam (1787-1798), Boetius Egan.³ (Since 1152, there are four Catholic archbishops on the Island of Ireland, at Armagh, Dublin, Cashel, and Tuam.) John J. Egan had previously seen this tomb when the flat stone that covers the entry was removed (as it could easily be when

we saw it) and what he saw persuaded him that Boetius Egan is buried in the tomb. Boetius was not popular locally, we were told, due to his opposition to the rebellion of 1798.⁴ (As it turned out, that may seem like a prudent position, but the whole story is a bit more complicated.^{5,6}) Perhaps this earned him the anonymous grave.



Upper right: ... ST. MARY'S NATIONAL SCHOOL /CLONBERN, 1976 (preceded by similar information in Irish)

Middle, below framed stone:

THIS STONE WAS THE INSCRIBED DATE STONE OF THE MAC AODHAGÁIN BREHON LAW SCHOOL PARK, CLONBERNE AND IS DATED 1627.

IT'S WHEREABOUTS WERE UNKNOWN FOR MANY YEARS UNTIL IT WAS FOUND BY FR. MICHAEL GODWIN, C.C. CLONBERNE, IN PATRICK KILMARTIN'S FARMYARD, TIMARD, CLONBERNE IN 1936

IT WAS RESITED HERE IN CLONBERNE NATIONAL SCHOOL ON 28 TH JULY 1991

THE STONE HAS THREE PANELS

THE PANEL ON THE LEFT IS DATED 1627 AND THERE IS A RELIGIOUS SYMBOL UNDERNEATH

THE MIDDLE PANEL IS COMPLETE AND READS:

CORMAC MAC AODAGAIN DO RINNE AND OB AIR SO AOIS AN TIGEARNA M...

I.E. CORMAC MAC AODHAGÁIN DID THIS WORK AT THE TIME OF THE AGE OF THE LORD...

THE INSCRIPTION OF THE RIGHT IS INCOMPLETE AND READS FROM BELW UPWARDS:

IN TAN SO M(ILE) BL (IADHAN) - SE C (EAD) I.E. ONE THOUSAND SIX HUNDRED AND TWENTY SEVEN.

THE UPPER LINE IS OBSCURE BUT MUST READ "FICHE A SEACHT"

THE LETTERS ARE RAISED AND THEIR NEATNESS IS ADMIRRED BY ALL ECLTIC SCHOLARS WHO HAVE READ THE INSCRIPTION

ERECTED BY CLONBERNE COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Fig. 1 Park Castle Date Stone and Inscription



Fig. 2 Egan Tomb at Clonberne. Inscription on front is shown in Fig. 3. The tomb has no top and plants are growing inside. Entrance to the burial chamber is apparently through the sloped slab at ground level below the inscription.

We had unknowingly visited the site of the Bishop Egan's consecration, the Protestant cathedral in Tuam.⁷ About the time of his appointment as bishop of the Diocese of Achonry, just north of the Archdiocese of Tuam, there was a significant improvement in Protestant-Catholic relations and, the Catholics having no suitable church, the Protestant community offered the use of their cathedral for the bishop's consecration.

Park Castle

We then went in search of Park Castle. We did not anticipate seeing much—Joseph and Mary Egan's book shows a (dark) photograph of the small remains⁸—but we were curious about what it looked like now and where it was situated. We unknowingly drove past it looking for Kiltullagh Loch but the lake is apparently not visible from the road. A local man came over to our car in the rain to help us. He directed us back in the direction from which we had come and he apparently remembered the remains of the castle as being more prominent than they are. But as we passed it a second time we caught sight of the name of a pub (shown in Fig. 5), "The Brehon Park Restaurant," and we knew we must be near. With directions from people in the pub, we went down the road a short distance where we met a farmer who pointed to the remains in his field. He said the field

was too wet for us to walk in but that we could go around the corner and drive through his gate to get a better look. We drove up the path to an unoccupied two-story stone house and took the picture in Fig. 6 from the vicinity.

A corner of the wall can be seen next to the telephone pole. This corner looks much like what is shown in Joseph and Mary Egan's book but their figure appears to show also a low wall behind the corner, perhaps covered with grass in Fig.6.

As we returned toward Clonbern, I spotted an old house that looked like one, shown in Costello's paper⁹, where Archbishop Egan had resided. There had not been a Catholic Archbishop's resident in Tuam since the time of Cromwell (138 years earlier) and Archbishop Egan decided to continue residency at the family home in Dunblaney, as he had while Bishop of Achonry. We stopped and inquired at an adjacent house. The resident said no, that wasn't the Egan house, but he knew where Dunblaney was and told us how to get there. We followed his directions with some uncertainty and, when we thought we might be there, we stopped and asked a farmer. He said we had indeed found Dunblaney but the old house was now *under* the road. He did not say where, and I would like to get some verification of that fact. He pointed out some buildings in the distance that had been part of the Egan's Dunblaney holdings but we had trouble identifying them when we got near.

Genealogy of the Dunblaney Egans

Figure 7 shows part of a tentative genealogy for the Egans near their last days at Dunblaney. This is from several sources. The names connected to the line at 3 (including further generations) were obtained from a descendent of Mary Thompson (right side of chart).¹⁰ The inscription on the tomb stone shown in Fig. 3 may mean that Patrick and James, shown at 4 in Fig. 7, and representatives of James Egan, MD, who had died three years before the date on the stone, are sponsoring the tomb. It is said to be for the families of James and John, probably the James and John shown at the highest (left most) level of Fig. 6. It also contains the body of the archbishop, the third person at that level. This implies that James had a family, although it is not shown on the chart.

Further, Costello¹¹ says that, "In the eighteenth century, two brothers lived and brought up their families in peace and harmony under one roof. Another older brother who was intended for the Church ... translated to the See of Tuam as Archbishop in 1787." This appears to describe the three persons at the highest level in Fig. 7.

Notice that there is a second Dr. Boetius Egan, a nephew of the Archbishop. He was a parish priest in Dunmore and was sometimes called Dean Egan, holding the position of Dean of the Archdiocese of Tuam. Monsignor D'Alton says of him, "It is strange that so respected a man had no monument erected to his memory, and that his grave in the Dunmore Churchyard is unknown."¹²—another Boetius Egan in an unmarked grave. Fr. Swords ascribes his lack of further advancement to the disfavor of the Archbishop, Dillon, who followed his uncle.¹³

Swords lists an uncle and two cousins of the archbishop who were prominent in the service of France, Spain, and Naples and quotes one correspondent to the papal nuncio as saying, "The house of Bourbon is indebted for the services of the distinguished family" of Egan.

The persons at 1 in Fig. 7 are my grandfather (William F.) and his siblings. They took O'Dowd from their mother but my Grandfather did not use it in the US. The ring in Fig. 4 was inscribed by his sister, Anne. John, and later James, lived by Cloonacastle^{14,15,16} in what is now the clubhouse at the Ballinrobe Golf Course. A daughter of James (at 1) indicated that William (at 2) was the grandnephew¹⁷ of the archbishop but she did not

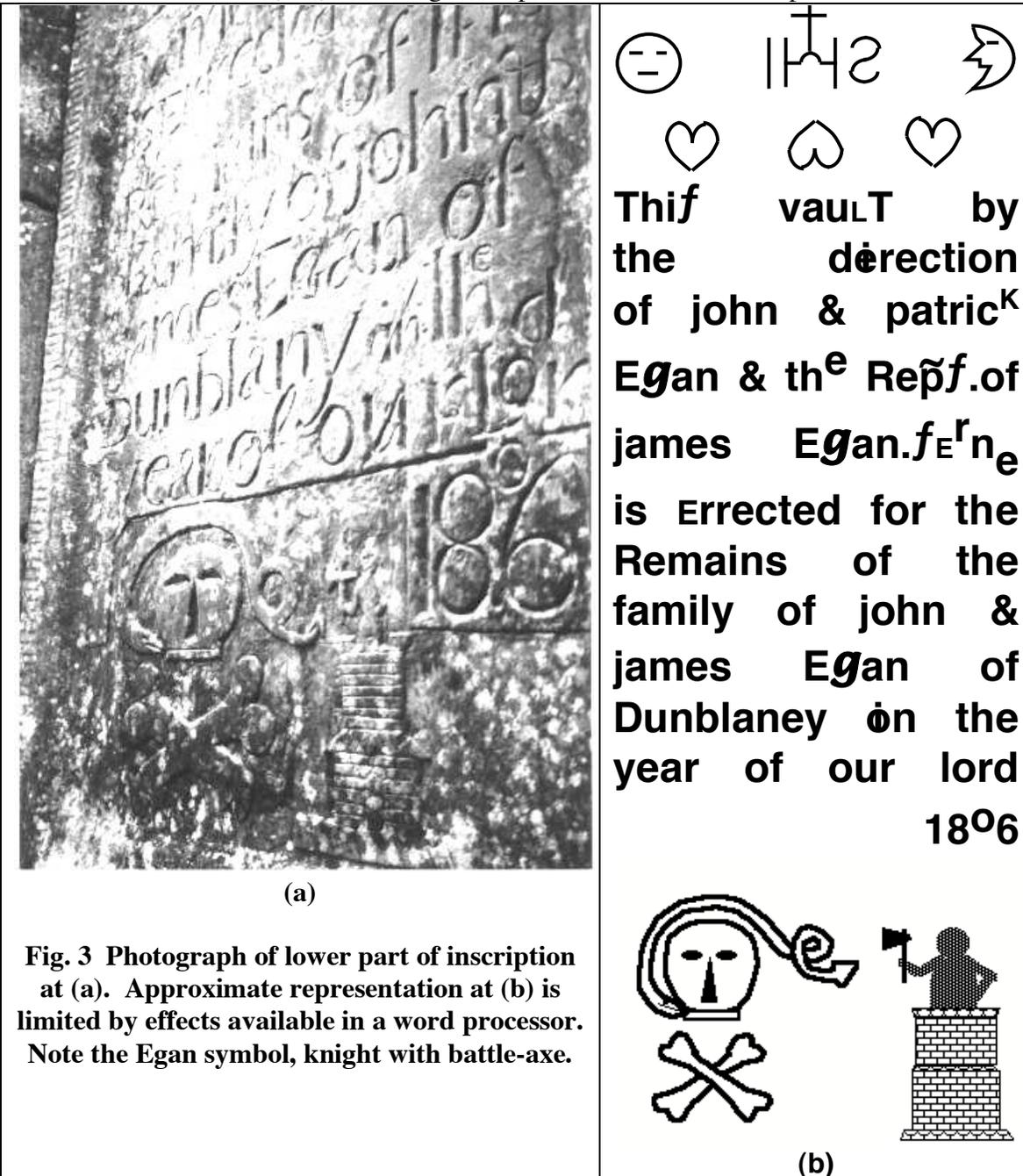


Fig. 3 Photograph of lower part of inscription at (a). Approximate representation at (b) is limited by effects available in a word processor. Note the Egan symbol, knight with battle-axe.

Fig. 4 Egan crest on a signet ring. Image is inverted so its impression will be correct. Compare to crest on tombstone.



Fig. 5 The Brehon Park Restaurant



Fig.6 Remains of Park Castle

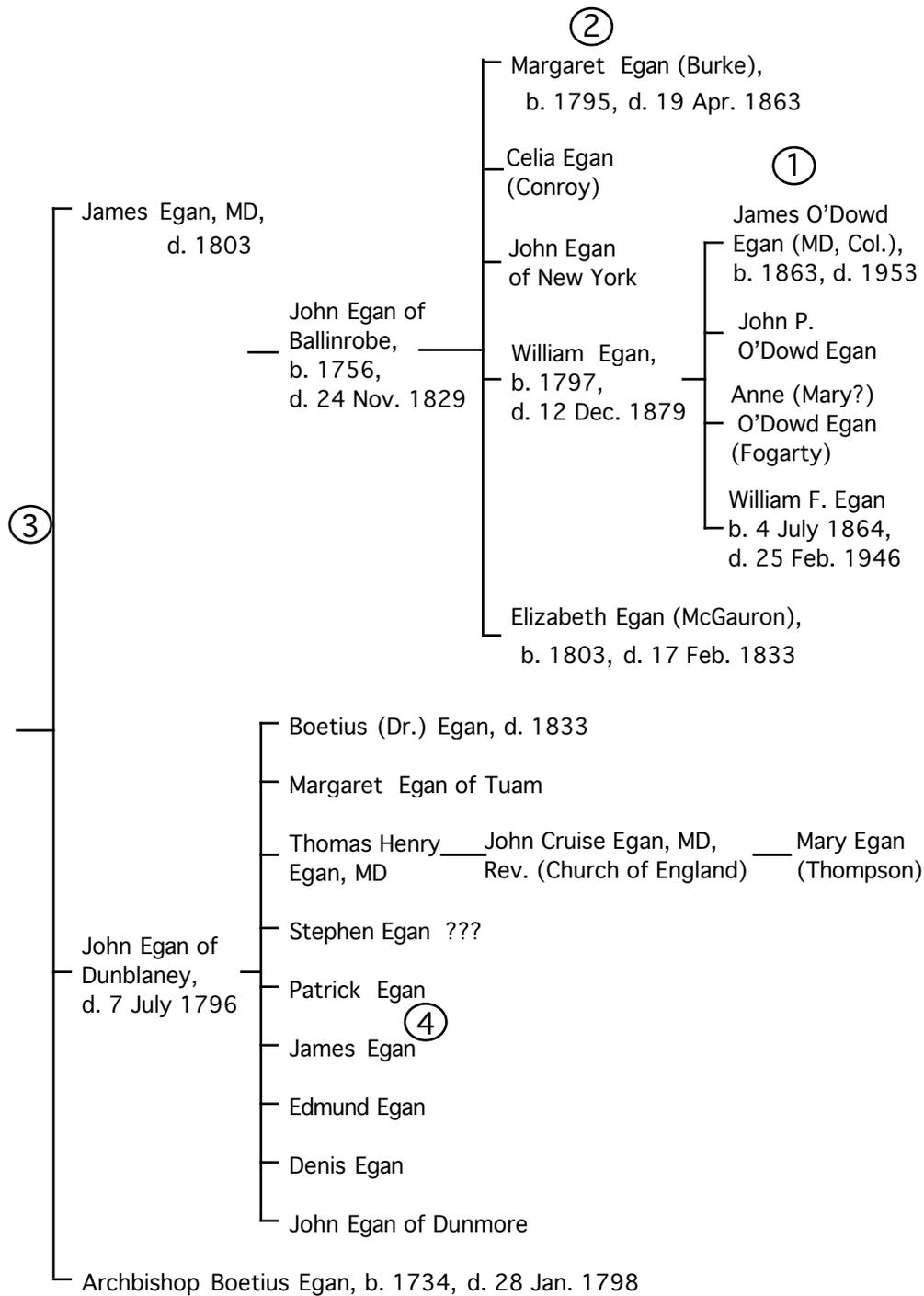


Fig. 7. Part of Dunblaney Egan's genealogy (tentative)

know the name of his father, that is, John of Ballinrobe. We discovered John's gravestone under his son's table gravestone (one that is supported by short legs) in the old Priory Cemetery in Ballinrobe, thus finding his name, his wife's name, and their dates of birth (approximately) and death. We also identified two of William's sisters (at 2), based on the positions of gravestones, information that has since been confirmed by his brother John's will in New York¹⁸.

John Egan of Ballinrobe might be a descendent of James Egan, MD or there might have been another brother who did not live at Dunblaney. He is apparently not John Egan of Dunmore.¹⁹

Manuscripts from Park

The *Book of Ollamhs* and *O'Davoren's Law Glossary* are manuscripts written at Park that contain interesting scribal notes that reflect then current events. The former is part of the *Yellow Book of Lecan*, which is in the library of Trinity College, Dublin. The latter is in the British Library, London.²⁰ Thomas B. Costello reproduces many of these margin notes in his work "The Ancient Law School of Park, Co. Galway." One entry is signed in 1464.²¹

Finding These Places

Fig. 7 shows the area we have discussed while Fig. 8 is an expanded view of our starting point in Clonbern, as best I recollect. I hope these will help anyone who wants to visit the places I have discussed but be aware that these are best estimates. In particular, I am doubtful about the location of Dunblaney and Fig. 8 might be oriented incorrectly.

Finding More

If you find out more, please let me know.¹

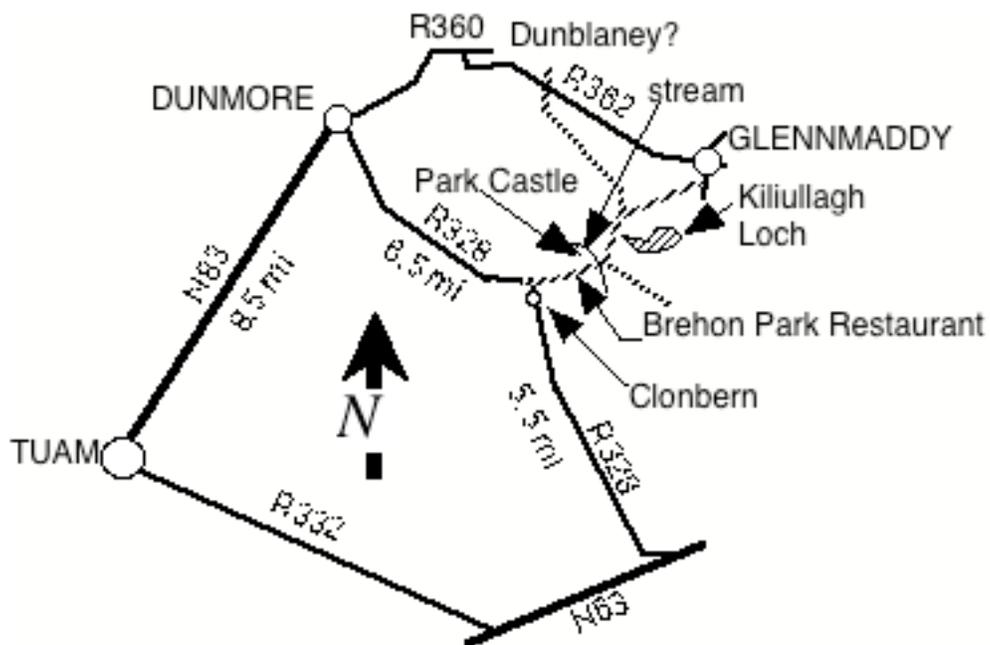


Fig. 8 Map of area discussed.

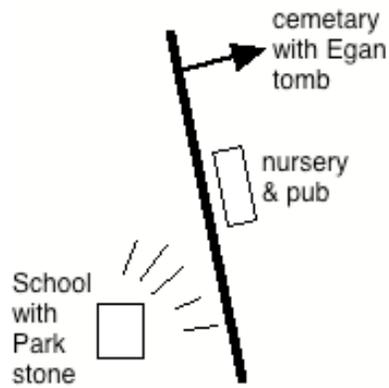


Fig. 9 In Clonbern

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- ¹ Bill Egan, 10188 Myer Place, Cupertino, CA 95014, 408-253-1844, billegan@aol.com
- ² Conor Mac Hale, *Annals of the Clan Egan*, (C. Mac Hale, Enniscrone, Co. Sligo, 1990), p. 46.
- ³ Thomas B. Costello, M.D., MRIA, “The Ancient Law School of Park, Co. Galway” *Journal of the Galway Archeological and Historical Society*, Vol. XIX, Nos. i & ii, 1940.
- ⁴ This event is described by the historical novel, “The Year of the French” by Thomas Flanagan (New York: Henry Holt, 1979) and in Edward Alfred D’Alton (see below), vol. I, pp. 329-332.
- ⁵ Joseph J. and Mary Joan Egan, *History of the Clan Egan*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1979), p. 102. This reference also says, “Archbishop Egan lies buried with his Park ancestors in Clonberne cemetery.”
- ⁶ Edward Alfred D’Alton (The Right Reverend Monsignor), *History of the Archdiocese of Tuam* (Dublin: The Phoenix Publishing Co., 1928) Vol. II, pp. 319-327.
- ⁷ Liam Swords, *A Hidden Church, the Diocese of Achonry, 1689-1818* (Dublin, the Columba Press, 1997), p. 154
- ⁸ Joseph J. and Mary Joan Egan, Fig. 1
- ⁹ Thomas B. Costello, p. 93
- ¹⁰ Most of what is shown attached to line 3 came from Mrs. Ann McCutcheon with the help of John J. Egan.
- ¹¹ Thomas B. Costello, p. 99.
- ¹² Edward Alfred D’Alton, Vol. II, p. 159.
- ¹³ Liam Swords, p. 278.
- ¹⁴ *An Archaeological Survey of Ballinrobe and District Including Lough Mask and Lough Carra*, ISBN 0951709127, (Lough Mask and Lough Carra Tourist Development Association, 1994) pp. 108-110
- ¹⁵ Edward Alfred D’Alton, Vol. I, p. 198; Vol. II, p. 175
- ¹⁶ John Jones, ed., *Treasures of South Mayo*, pp. 51-52.
- ¹⁷ At times there seems to be some confusion as to whether he was nephew or grandnephew. The existence of another Dr. Boetius Egan one generation earlier can cause confusion when tracing this relationship.
- ¹⁸ From Michael James O’Dowd Egan of Canada.
- ¹⁹ Based on a statement in a letter from Mrs. Ann McCutcheon and their having different wives, although I do not know date of death for wife of John of Dunmore, so one could have died before he married the other.
- ²⁰ Conor Mac Hale, p. 61.
- ²¹ Thomas B. Costello, p. 90.