

The scribes: their lives and scribal outputs

1. Mícheál mac Peattair (c. 1693-1770)

spent his early years at Ballydonoghue, near Glin, Co. Limerick. He was employed as land agent to Edmond Fitzgerald (d. 1765), last Catholic Knight of Glin. The latter was divested of his lands in 1741 upon the conversion of his brother to Protestantism, thereby inheriting the Glin title and lands. Shortly after this time Mícheál mac Peattair had a disagreement with the new Knight and he left Glin. Thereafter he led a fairly peripatetic existence in Limerick and west Cork. His journeyings brought him into contact with poets and scholars and he participated in poetry gatherings of the Maigne poets (Aindrias Mac Craith and others). He composed poetry himself e.g. ‘Im aisling ar mo leabaidh is mé aréir im luighe’ (‘In a dream last night as I lay upon my bed’).

For the most part, Mícheál mac Peattair’s scribal works lack details such as places and dates of composition, however there is evidence that he completed his first transcription in 1711 at the age of 18 — a copy of the *Chronicum Scotorum*. This is now in the collections of the American Irish Historical Society at New York. From 1740 onwards more of his transcripts can be dated and placed in context. He transcribed MS 23 0 37, shown here, in Dublin c. 1752 for Dr John Fergus (d. 1761). We also find him in Bandon, east Carbery and south Kerry. He transcribed prose, poetry, Ossianic tales, medical materials, histories.

He also transcribed genealogies of Munster families for the Right Rev. Seán Ó Briain, Catholic Bishop of Cloyne and Ross (1748-69). Ó Briain was a lexicographer and would have required texts from which to extrapolate vocabulary for his projected Irish-English dictionary — *Focalóir Gaoidhilge-Sax Bhéarla* (Paris, 1768). Ó Briain became a patron of Mícheál mac Peattair and introduced him to others who required scribal services.

Mícheál mac Peattair settled in Carrignavar, Co. Cork, in the 1760s. His son, Mícheál Óg was born in 1766 at Béal Átha Maghair. Nothing is known of Mícheál mac Peattair’s wife. He died around 1770 and was buried at An Teampall Geal Móin Mhór in north Co. Cork.

