



“A Letter from Ireland”

The Best of 2013

Your Irish Heritage

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A Letter from Ireland

Mike Collins

Your Irish Heritage

Product of County Cork,

Ireland.

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Introduction

Hi, my name is Rosaleen Collins and I'm Mike and Carina Collins' daughter. I have worked a lot with my Dad on Your Irish Heritage over the past year, so when my dad asked me to choose the top ten letters from 2013 of course I said yes!

I thought it would be a great way to catch up on any letters I may have missed as well as seeing the amazing responses from so many different people.

I made sure to take in which letters were most popular with you, the readers. I also wanted to get the biggest mixture to show all the different aspects of Ireland that we cover at Your Irish Heritage.

Of course, the majority of the letters focus on Irish surnames but there are also letters touching on the Irish Famine, Irish Law and the counties of Ireland. It was very hard to cut it down to just ten letters, but I hope I have chosen a good mix and that at least one of YOUR favourites has made it into this small selection.

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Enjoy, Rosaleen Collins,

Your Irish Heritage.

PS – Do feel free to share this among your family and friends!

Letter 1 - Nine Surnames from Your Irish Heritage

June 9, 2013

Céad Míle Failte wherever you are! I'm sitting here on a nice sunny morning in Cork – feels like we've gone from mid-winter to mid-summer in two weeks.

At Your Irish Heritage – we focus on your Irish surnames and where in Ireland they come from – why? Simply because this matters to people!

The 3 most common questions I get asked are:

1. My name is "O'whatishisname" – is it Irish?
2. Where in Ireland does the name come from?
3. My great Grandfathers name is Joe Conlon – he came from Kilkenny – we traced him as far as the parish hall in Ballingroibertown – and the trail ran cold. Can you help?

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Questions 1 and 2 are what we are all about, as for question 3? Sorry – lots of other people can – but we can't help.

So, today we're going to dive into the background of Irish surnames and locations. We're going to do this with a little help from one of our readers – Barbara Melanson O'Regan who is based in the USA. When she contacted me first, she passed on NINE Irish names (names in her ancestry that left Ireland for the US over the past few hundred years).

Yep – Nine names!

So, I had a look at them and found that they were a great mix of Gaelic, pre-Gaelic, English settler and Anglo-Norman names.

Now, while we won't go into the specifics about Barbara's ancestry – let's use each of these names to bring a slightly different aspect of Irish heritage to the fore.

Ready? Let's go:

1. Eaton – Emigrated from County Kerry.

This is an English surname derived from a place name that would have appeared in Ireland from the 16th century onwards. Why? Typically as settlers, planters, soldiers. Lots of possibilities there.

I'm often asked about a certain Irish name of English origin and where in Ireland it comes from. But many English planters would have travelled to Ireland as individuals or small groups – and there

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is often no specific place associated with these individual English names. Unless they had powerful lordships – then they could name everything around them after their family!



Ring, County Waterford

2. Keane – Emigrated from County Waterford.

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Irish Gaelic surnames typically come originally from a first name – in this case the Irish “O Cein” which means “from Cein” which is more or less the modern Irish first name Cian.

This sept or clan would have started out in the County Waterford area of Munster – and it seems like Barbara’s ancestor stayed in this area until they emigrated. This is typical of many Irish Gaelic Families – they tended to stay near the family lands for life, or move en masse.

3. Kenneally - Emigrated from County Waterford.

I mentioned how Gaelic surnames come from original first names. Well, where do Gaelic first names come from?

The original Gaelic first names were typically descriptions of a quality the person had. Often visual, a personality trait or compared to an animal. In this case – it’s the Irish “O Cinnfhaolaidh” – meaning “head of a Wolf”.

The Kenneallys were part of the Ui Fidgheinte sept which was found in Connelloe. Parts of the Ui Fidgheinte moved en masse as families (the O’Collins and O’Donovans to West Cork) when displaced by the Anglo Normans. But the Kenneallys were displaced all over many parts of South Munster.

4. MacNamee - Emigrated from County Westmeath.

Have you a poet in your family? A feature of the old Gaelic system was a very strict hierarchy. The lords and the top – and each

lordship was surrounded by many types of roles and professions: poets, soldiers, doctors, genealogists and so on.

Often certain surnames were associated with certain professions - as in this case. The Mac Namees (Mac Conmidhe – sons of the hounds of Meath – more dog names!) – were the Filí and Ollamhs (poets and scholars) to the O’Neill lords around present day County Tyrone.

5. Manning - emigrated from County Meath.

There’s a peculiarity with Irish names. When they were anglicized from the original Irish – sometimes this was done phonetically and sometimes by choosing the closest-sounding English name. As a result, you might find a name that is both Gaelic and English in origin.

This is the case with Manning. It is originally an English name – and when you find it today in counties Cork and Dublin it’s often belonging to people whose ancestors came from England.

But it is also a version of the Gaelic surname - “Mannion” – which you will find mostly in County Galway. This version is descended from the pre-Gaelic Sodhan race – and would have roots similar to the Picts of eastern Scotland.

6. Power - Emigrated from County Waterford.

“More Irish than the Irish themselves” was a quote from the 15th century. It related to many of the Anglo-Norman lords who invaded Ireland in the 13th century and became completely “Hibernicized” – absorbing Gaelic customs, dress and language.

Power was one of those families – typically now found in County Waterford and one of the 50 most numerous surnames in Ireland.

7. Stanley - Emigrated from County Westmeath.

Remember Stanley and Livingstone? “Doctor Livingstone I presume?” Like Sir Henry Stanley – this name is of English origin and based on an English place name.

That’s often the difference between English and Gaelic surnames. It seemed to be important to give the location or profession (Smith, Carpenter etc.) in an English surname. For a Gaelic surname – the emphasis was on which specific family grouping you came from and who you are related to. When you understand this difference, you understand a lot about tracing Irish surnames and locations.

And Stanley came to Ireland very early – been around since the 1200s – and settled in counties Louth and Meath.

8. Sullivan - Emigrated from County Kerry.

Sullivan which comes from O Sulleabhain – which probably means “one eye”. This is the most numerous name in Munster (the most numerous in Ireland is Murphy).

The Sullivans originally came from South Tipperary (about 1000 years but were driven west into Cork and Kerry to become an important part of the Eoghanacht tribe (lord of which were the McCarthys).

So which is right? “Sullivan” or “O’Sullivan”?

Well, they were all O’Suileabhain at one time. BUT then it became beneficial to drop the O during penal times for Gaels. This dropping of the O lasted until a Gaelic revival of the 1800s – when many surnames put the Os (and the macs) back into their surnames. But not everyone did.

For example – many of the emigrants to the USA and Australia would have left before the O came back and so you find many Sullivans overseas. Also, it seems that the majority of Sullivans in Kerry left the O out – while in Cork, they went back to become O’Sullivan.

Can be confusing, can’t it?

9. Terry - Emigrated from County Waterford.

An old Anglo Norman who settled in a specific area – Cork city and county since the 13th century. You’ll also find this name in this form in England – so it is possible that it also belonged to an English planter.

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So that's it! Phew! Nine names leading to one person. Our newsletter was a bit long this week, but I hope you enjoyed it – each name teased out a different aspect of Irish Heritage.

Many thanks to Barbara for sharing her name – and do remember to share yours if you haven't done so already.

I'll see you next week! :)

Slán, Mike...

Letter 2 - Running an Irish Castle for a Day

June 16, 2013

Céad Míle Failte wherever you are! The weather here in Cork has switched back to “changeable” – and makes you quickly realise why Ireland is so green!

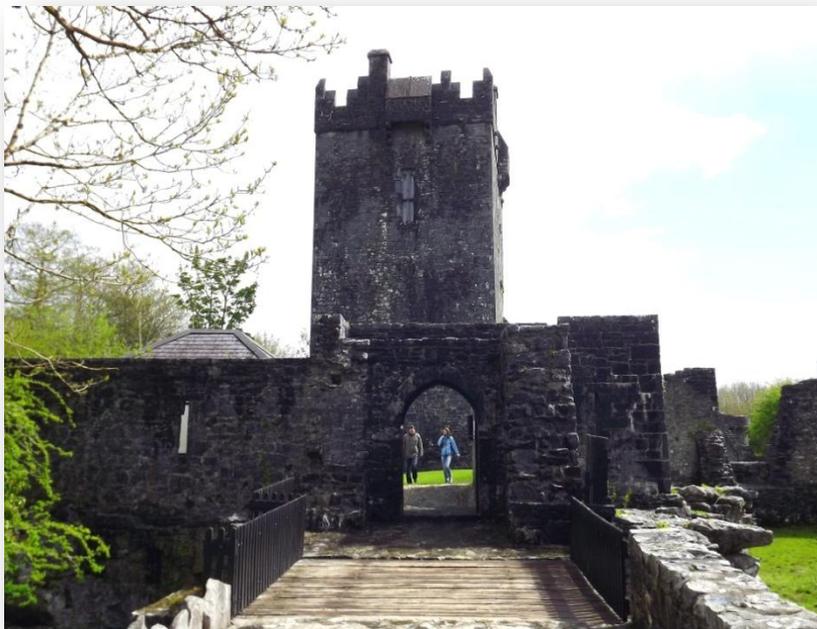
Today we’re going to have a look at what it takes to run a household. Sound exciting?

But we’re not talking about a household – more a castle – and the large family estate of lands that surround it.

You see, a few weeks back, Carina and myself went to County Galway and visited Aughnanure castle in Oughterard. Ever been there? Here’s a picture of what it looks like.

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Aughnanure was the main castle of the O'Flaherty Clan – the kings and lords of West Connaught – and was one of five castles they kept in the area.



Aughnacore Castle, County Galway

The O'Flahertys were lords of the Ui Bruin Seala sept - originally from around present day Galway city - but were driven west in the 1200s where they held sway for over 400 years.

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But – that’s not what we want to talk about today. Back to household management.

What caught our eye in the castle was a great illustration of the people it took to support a Gaelic royal household at the time. It gave us an insight into Gaelic society of mediaeval times and when we dug a little deeper, many of the roles were held by particular families – maybe you’ll see you own surname?

So, what was life like in the Gaelic castle? John Dunton observed at the time:

“the hall is crowned with poets and musicians ... ladies embroidered rare tissues ... Fighting men abound. Mantles are made and swords sharpened, wounded men are attended to by doctors, criminals are being punished, part of the day is spent listening to romances.”

The information poster at Aughnanure went through the retinue that the O'Flaherty had in his circle. They included a:

- Genealogist
- Physician
- Travelling Bard and Harpist
- Judge
- Steward
- Blacksmith
- Gallowglass (soldiers)
- Revenue collector

- Cup bearers
- Beekeeper

But there was very little information - so we decided to dig a little deeper and here's what we came up with.

1. Ollamh (pronounced “Ollav”)

The word Ollamh is used today to mean “professor” but in medieval times it meant scholar or master – often the master of a particular discipline. When the word “Ollamh” was used by itself, it typically meant a scholar historian/poet/genealogist.

The Ollamh for history and poetry for the O’Flahertys (recording of genealogies, writing up of events, writing of poems) fell to the Kilkelly family.

While every chief had its own Ollamh, the head Ollamh of a province such as Connaught would have been the head of all the Ollamhs in that province, and would have been a social equal of the provincial king.

Other typical family names for the Ollamhs were O’Dalaigh (Daly), Cassidy, Ward, Forbes, Higgins, Keenan, Mulconroy and Cleary.

2. Physician

The practice of medicine was reserved for a select number of families. Father typically passed his medical knowledge to son and sometimes to daughter or kinsman – ensuring that specific family groups retained the knowledge as hereditary physicians.

The Physician family to the O’Flahertys were the Canavans. Other physician families included Cassidy, Shields, Callinan, Beglin, Hickey and Lee.

3. Judge

Early Irish law was known as Brehon law. It was a complex system of law that delivered judgements based on the strict hierarchy that existed in Gaelic society. Each Gaelic chieftain had their own judge (Brehon) to interpret the laws against individual local cases.

The O’Mullawill family (also known as Lavelle) is the Brehon (judge) of O’Flaherty.

There were many Brehon families in Ireland who ran the law schools and maintained an expertise within their own family - names such as Breslin, Davoren, Donnellan, Coffey, Keenan and Egan.

4. Steward

The steward was responsible for the day to day running of the castle - preparing of banquets, sourcing provisions, directing the servants.

The Morrolly family provided the head stewards for the O'Flahertys.

5. Soldiers

A Gaelic Chieftain typically had to maintain a standing army, however small, of a number of horsemen and soldiers. He often brought in Gallowglass (mercenaries) for particular battles.

I'm not sure who the marshals and commanders of the horse were for the O'Flahertys - but my own mothers family - the Mannions - were responsible for marshalling the forces (and leading into battle) of the O'Kellys in nearby east Galway. That explains why you always did what you were told in our house!

6. Erenagh

The Erenagh was effectively the rent and tithe collector (close to a modern accountant) for church and parish lands. The Erenagh family within one of the O'Flahertys territories were the O'Leathcargais.

Other Erenagh families from around the country were the Cronins for the McCarthys, the McInerneys for the McNamaras (in fact, McInerney literally means "son of the Eranagh"), Lennon, Farrelly, O'Herlihy, Connole, O'Doerty, Sheridan, Hourihan and Scullin.

7. Keeper of the Bees

Remember that honey provided the only source of sweetness in the Irish diet - something to be nurtured, cherished and guarded. The O'Conlachtna were the keepers of the Bees for the O'Flahertys.

And that's only touching the surface of the roles and tasks that it took to run a Gaelic Chieftains affairs. In future newsletters, we'll come back to this and include some of your own stories and family surnames.

The most interesting thing for me is to realise that Irish families often had certain traditional work running through the generations (my own family of Collins' were boat builders and carpenters for generations) as well as being anchored in particular locations.

How about you? Do certain professions and roles run in your own family? Maybe you see one of your family surnames above?

I'll see you next week! :)

Slán, Mike...

Letter 3 - Losing your O's and Macs – and getting them back

June 23, 2013

Céad Míle Failte wherever you are – from here in County Cork on a lovely Sunday morning in June! Hope you have a nice cup of tea or coffee at hand (I'm having a cup of Barry's tea myself).

Today, we're going to browse the evolution of the surname in Ireland – something I know is close to your heart! Next week we'll look at Viking, Norman and Planter names – but this week we start with the old Gaelic names.

When we opened our new online store – we mentioned that everything is customisable. The questions flowed in thick and heavy! Let's use some of these questions to illustrate the source of many Gaelic surnames.

First up:

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The name is McGee - and don't call me Bobby!

I got an email from Mary McGee – she wanted to put her Irish name on one of our Mayo pictures – a birthday present. She then asked: “I met a lady called McCoy last year – she insisted we are distant cousins – how could that be?”



Keem Beach, Achill Island, County Mayo

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Looking through our reader list – I notice that we have Keyes, MacHugh, Gee, McGee, O’Hea, Hayes, MacKaw Makay and McCoy. What do you think ALL of these surnames have in common? These surnames have all been anglicized from the same Irish surname - “Mac Aodha” (son of Aodh) or “O hAodha” (descendent of Aodh).

Aodh (pronounced “Aay” – rhymes with “hay”) was a very popular first name in Ireland up to the 10th century.

Up to that point individuals were known by their first names and lineage. So, individuals were known as “Aodh son of Donnchadh” and so on.

And then from the 900s to 1100s – families adopted the surname system we know today. Lots of families across Ireland (and Scotland) chose the name MacAodha or O hAodha – and that got anglicized into the different surnames we see above over the next few centuries.

So, Mary – I guess we’re all cousins going back to Adam and Eve – but this lady is unlikely to be yours!

How about you?

The First Surnames.

Next, June MacCarthy got in touch – she wanted us to do up family greeting cards with a picture of Blarney Castle featuring the name

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McCarthy. Then she asked “why do YOU write McCarthy as McCarthy?”

Ireland was one of the first countries in Europe to introduce a surname system in the 10th century.

Most Gaelic surnames were formed around an illustrious ancestor e.g. the O'Briens from Brian Boru. Gaelic surnames typically have one of five prefixes:

- “O” as in O'Brien or O'Neill.
- Mc or Mac – as in McCarthy or McCoy.
- Gil – which comes from the Irish “Giolla” meaning follower – as in Gilmartin.
- Mul – like in Mulrooney or Mullarkey.
- Sometimes a combination of the above as in Mac Giolla Iosa (MacAleese).

A smaller class of Irish surname named the family after an occupation or profession e.g. McInerney (Mac an Airchinnigh in Irish) which means “son of the eranagh (a type of accountant)” OR Hickey (in Irish O hIcídhe) which means from the Doctor or Healer.

June wondered about the difference between a Mc and a Mac – some people ask is the Mc Irish and the Mac Scottish? The answer is: there is no difference! They are abbreviations.

Losing the Os and Macs - and getting them back.

Mary Sullivan contacted me – a fine Cork name – she wanted to us to do a framed picture of Cobh with her name in Irish. She also commented “it’s a pity our family lost the “O” when we came to the States.”

But, there’s a bit more to it than that. From the 1600s on – Gaelic and Catholic people were discriminated against by the English ascendancy – and this led, gradually, to the abandonment of the Os and Macs in many surnames. O’Murphy became Murphy, O’Kelly became Kelly and so on.

However, in the late 19th century there was a Gaelic cultural resurgence in Ireland and many of these surnames took their Os and Macs back as a badge of Gaelic pride.

Take “O’Sullivan” as an example – when we look at the census data the following comes up:

Year:	Percentage using the prefix O
1866	4%
1890	13%
1914	20%
1944	60%

So, you can see that many emigrants who left Ireland during famine times were missing their Os and Macs – and mostly never took them back. Whereas a high percentage of those who stayed in Ireland had them reinstated.

Maybe it's time to take your O or Mac back?

Mary is going to stick with "Sullivan" for now!

That's it for this week – our rundown on Gaelic names. Next week we will cover other Irish surnames including Norman, Viking and planter names and families.

I'll see you next week! :)

Slán, Mike...

Letter 4 - The Melting Pot of Ireland

June 9, 2013

Céad Míle Failte wherever you are – from here in County Cork. Another lovely Sunday morning in June (must be a record)! Hope you have a nice cup of tea or coffee at hand (I'm having a cup of Green tea myself).

Today, let's continue with the evolution of your surname in Ireland – last week we looked at the old Gaelic surnames.

Today we're looking at Viking, Norman, Galloglass and Planter (English and Scottish) names.

Let's take a few examples using one of our Readers – Patricia Clarke (thanks, Patricia J). Patricia gave me six of her family names: Byrnes, Clarke, Halpin, Leonard, Martin and Rafferty.

While I may be COMPLETELY incorrect with the specifics of Patricia's actual family – we'll use them for illustration!

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The Melting Pot of Ireland.

I often get asked the question: “Is my surname Irish?” My answer is simple: If your family has lived on this island for some time then YES – even though the name may be of Norse, English, Scottish origin etc. Let’s remind ourselves of the mix of people have lived on this small island:

- Up until 500BC – “Fir Bolg” and the “Tuatha Dé Dannan” lived in Ireland
- Around 500BC – Arrival of the Celts (we call the “Gaels” today) – intermarry with people on the island
- Around 800s – Arrival of the Vikings – who intermarry with the native Gaels. Start of the “surname system”
- 1100s Arrival of the Normans – and their surnames – who intermarry with the natives
- 1200s Arrival of the Galloglass (Scottish Mercenaries) – and their surnames
- 1500s – English take control of the island and start of major “plantations” of settlers from both England and Scotland – who bring their surnames

Viking Surnames.

Patricia had the surname “Halpin” on her list. When found in Ireland, this name is typically of Norse origins.

The Vikings appeared in Ireland about the 800s - and established strongholds in most of the current-day cities - Dublin, Waterford, Cork, Limerick and Wexford.



A Viking Base, County Wexford

Gradually, the native Gaels learned to fight back and through intermarriage the Vikings were subsumed into the Irish culture and DNA melting pot.

Names such as Cotter, Dromgoole, Doyle, Jennings, Lappin, Higgins,

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McLaughlin, McManus, Halpin, Swan, Grimes, Sweetman, Storey, Hendrick, Rourke, Cosgrave, Kitt, Broderick, Kirby, Hewson, Dolphin and Coppinger would all be modern-day Irish surnames of Viking descent.

At this stage, most of those names would be considered “normal” Irish names.

Maybe you see one of your names here?

Norman Surnames.

The Normans arrived in Ireland in 1169 at the invitation of a deposed Gaelic king, Dermot McMurrugh. Looking at Patricia’s names – there is one of specific Norman origin – Martin – one of the more common names in Ireland today.

Initially, the Normans kept their own identity, but became subsumed into Gaelic culture over subsequent decades. Norman descendants today can be recognised by their surnames such as Condon, Bermingham, French, Butler, Barry, Power, Prendergast, Barrett, Plunkett, Roche, Burke, D’Arcy and Cogan. Other Norman names begin with Fitz (from the Norman for son) include Fitzgerald, Fitzgibbon and Fitzmaurice.

Patricia’s family surname of “Martin” probably came to Ireland around this time. One of the more famous Martin families was one of the “Tribes of Galway”.

Galloglass Surnames.

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After the arrival of the Normans in Ireland the Irish Chieftains needed to halt their advances –the Norman’s arms, armour and tactics were superior to anything the Gaelic Chieftains had. They turned to the Gallowglass or ‘foreign Gaels’ – a band of elite warriors from the Hebrides Isles of Scotland who were of Norse/Scottish descendency.

The first Gallowglass arrived in Ireland in 1259 and these mercenaries were soon in demand from the warring Irish Chiefs.

The McCabes and MacSweeneys were so successful that their clans transplanted completely to Ireland while others such as the MacDonalDs, MacNeills, MacSheehy, McCoys and MacRorys maintained their lands in Scotland as well as establishing new territories in Ireland – especially in the Ulster area.

English and Scottish Planter Surnames.

From the time of Henry VIII – the English administration took an active interest in making Ireland a more “civilised” place. One of their strategies was to transplant large numbers of Scottish lowlanders and English border natives (with their protestant culture and farming methods) into areas of good land in Ireland displacing the Gaelic lordships of the region.

Plantation of parts of Ireland started in the 1550s and lasted until 1714. During this time Ireland took in between 150,000 and 250000 English and Scottish immigrants (the population of Ireland in 1700 was about 1 million).

They arrived as adventurers, tenants, people seeking a better life/escaping religious persecution or as payment for soldiering. Most remained distinctly apart from the Gaelic Irish – maintaining their own protestant culture. Others such as 10000 of Cromwell's soldiers were paid with land grants. Most of these were single men and married with the native Irish women.

There is, of course, a whole story here about land displacement, rebellion, religious and racial persecution – but we won't be going into that here.

Instead – let's focus on the surnames.

English and Scottish border surnames are distinctly different from Irish and Scottish highland surnames. With Gaelic surnames, the persons lineage is to the forefront (MacCarthy = son of Carthaigh OR O'Carroll = of the Carrolls).

English surnames tend to be mostly occupational (Smith, Cooper, Wright etc.) or related to a place (Churchill, Harland, Hall, Wood etc.). Patricia gives us the surname of Leonard - a common English name. But, is it a "planter" name?

When tracing you family ancestors in Ireland – with an “English” surname, there are two things to bear in mind:

Gaelic names are often associated with specific territories for hundreds of years – and have often moved as extended families.

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This makes it easier to talk about where in Ireland a Gaelic surname comes from. With English “planter” names – there is rarely such a family movement context. Research depends on tracing the records of individuals.

Through the 19th century the Anglicisation of Gaelic names took place. This often resulted in Gaelic names being translated to similar English a name. My own Irish name is O Coileain – which becomes Collins when translated to English. Other confusing examples are O Laithbheartaigh which translates in some places to Lavery and some other places to Armstrong.

A final example would be Clifford – if this is for a family from Kerry it is almost always a Gaelic family – anywhere else in the country it would be an English planter name.

That’s the end of our trip through the melting pot of surnames that belong to so many people from this Island – all Irish, but with so many stories behind the individual surnames.

Slán, Mike...I’ll see you next week! :)

Letter 5 - Dear Old Skibbereen

July 14, 2013

A very different sort of letter today. My original plan was to talk a little about the pattern of emigration from Ireland over the last 300 years – and how that has been so linked to climate and harvest failures.

But, sometimes feelings overtake facts.

As I went through much of the wonderful literature – especially the “Atlas of the Great Irish Famine” - a single photograph jumped out. It was a picture from 2009. In it, the children of a local school, about 80 in total, linked hands around a small green plot in Abbeystrewery cemetery in Skibbereen.

They looked like a red daisy chain against the vibrant green of the well-mown plot.

However, buried under that small plot were between 8000 and 10000 famine victims – dead from hunger and disease.

You really cannot separate feelings from facts when you look at such a picture – my own great-grandparents are buried in the cemetery. Their mothers and fathers would have been alive at the time of these burials.

Perhaps yours were too.

As you look at the famines and crop failures of the 1700s and the 1800s - which drove so many of the population of this island to so many corners of the world – you start to notice the pattern of rent-racking, eviction and land-grabs that amplified these terrible natural disasters so much more. First, the Ulster Scots left their small-holdings in their hundreds of thousands for the colonies - and later the Gaelic Irish in even greater numbers.

It becomes very difficult to articulate the feelings that well up inside. So, it's time to stop. I'll give up on my own words now – and turn to the lyrics of the 19th century folk song “Skibbereen”:

*“Oh father dear, I oft-times hear you speak of Erin's isle
Her lofty hills, her valleys green, her mountains rude and
wild*

*They say she is a lovely land wherein a saint might dwell
So why did you abandon her, the reason to me tell.
Oh son, I loved my native land with energy and pride*

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*Till a blight came o'er the praties; my sheep, my cattle died
My rent and taxes went unpaid, I could not them redeem
And that's the cruel reason why I left old Skibbereen."*

Do reply if you would like to share any comments or stories. Next week we'll get back to more information on the families of Ireland. For now, I hope you have a safe, healthy and happy week with your family and friends.

I'll see you next week.

Slán, Mike...

Letter 6 - A Roadtrip through Five Irish Counties

August 4, 2013

Céad Míle Failte wherever you are – from here in County Cork. We got back late last night from a great road trip during which we covered 16 counties across Ireland. We travelled from south to north and back down again (you can see the map on the following page).

And that's what I'd like us to talk about today – the Counties of Ireland.

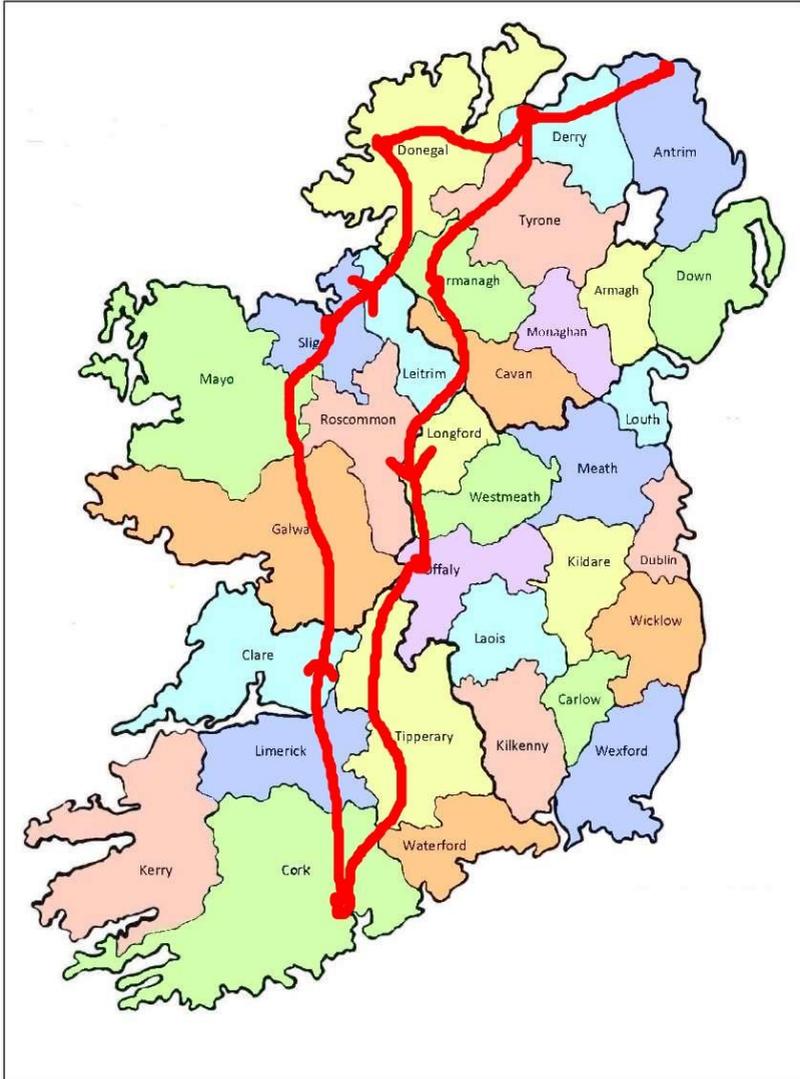
Which county in Ireland are your families from?

Whenever I ask that question – the answers come in by the tens and hundreds! We all seem to have a very strong emotional tie with the counties of our heritage.

But let's get it straight – counties were put into place as a means of administration. A way to divide land for taxation and grant purposes. Today, however, we're going to stick with the stories of

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the counties – the names and families associated with each.



Now, don't worry, I won't keep you here all day going through all of the 16 counties we travelled through – we'll start with the first 5 counties on our trip this week – and then cover the others over the next 2 weeks.

Remember that before the arrival of the Normans in the 1200s – there were no counties in Ireland. There were five provinces and a whole string of independent kingdoms. In general, counties were made by combining smaller Gaelic territories in a way that suited the English administration at the time and had little to do with older tribal boundaries.

County Cork.

Cork is the largest county in Ireland. Before it became a county in Ireland, it was part of the Kingdom of Desmond – ruled by the MacCarthy family and their princely septs of the O'Sullivan, O'Donoghue, O'Callaghan, O'Keefe, McAuliffe, O'Donovan, O'Mahony, O'Driscoll, O'Crowley, MacSweeney, O'Leary, O'Healy, and O'Riordan.

One of your families?

After the Norman Invasion in the 12th century, the McCarthy clan were pushed west into what is now West Cork and County Kerry and the north and east of Cork were taken by the FitzGerald, who became the Earls of Desmond. They had a number of Norman families under their lordship such as the Roches, Condons and Barrys.

Like many of the counties of Ireland – County Cork gets its name from its main city - Cork comes from the Irish “Corcaigh” which means marshy ground. The County of Cork was “shired” by the 1200s but officially created in 1606.

County Limerick.

From the 4th to the 12th century, the ancient Gaelic kingdom of the Uí Fidgente was approximately the same as the modern County Limerick.

After losing a two century conflict with the neighbouring O'Briens of the Dal gCais, most of the rulers fled for County Cork (the Collins', O'Donovans and so on). Their lands were almost immediately occupied by the FitzGerald's and other Norman families such as the Delanceys, and Burkes, who permanently prevented their return.

Limerick City – which gives County Limerick its name – was founded by the Vikings in 922. The County of Limerick was shired by the 1200s by the Normans – but only officially became a county in 1609.

County Clare.

County Clare was originally part of the Kingdom of Connacht ruled by the Uí Fiachrach Aidhne tribe, but was annexed to the Kingdom of Munster and settled by the Dal gCais in the mid-10th century. It was renamed Thomond, translating as North Munster. This was the time of Brian Boru - the most famous High King of Ireland. From

1118 onwards the Kingdom of Thomond became the stomping ground of the O'Brien Clan.

The various families associated with the O'Briens were the O'Dea, McMahon, McNamara, McGarry, O'Grady, Hogan, Conidine and Lynch families.

One of the most striking things you notice as you travel through County Clare is the sheer number of castles. They seem to come up every couple of miles. This usually indicates just what a volatile area this was – with lines of power under constant challenge between the various families and the nearby Normans.

Thomond was handed over to the English Government in 1543 and the area became the county we know today as Clare.

The name Clare comes from the Irish “Clar” – and is derived from the area around the modern town of Clarecastle.

County Galway.

Nowadays, Galway is part of the province of Connaught. However, if we go back to the time to before the arrival of the Normans – there was no County Galway – but there was the Kingdom of Connaught.

And this Kingdom was ruled over by the O'Connors.

Today, if you travel through County Galway, you might notice a county with three distinct personalities:

- Galway City itself – This was built up by the Burke family and the “tribes of Galway” – mostly a Norman merchant class (is your family one of the Tribes of Galway?)
- East Galway – this was the kingdom of Ui Maine – ruled over by the O’Kellys
- Iar Connacht or Connemara – which was a kingdom ruled over by the O’Flahertys.

In 1556 the Kingdom of Connacht was broken up into the County of Galway was formed.

Our final county for today is....

County Mayo.

Like Galway, County Mayo was originally part of the ancient Kingdom of Connaught. The chief kings in the area at that time were the O'Malleys and O'Dowds.

Funny enough, there is a Mayo Village which gives the county its name – but all that is left of this village are the ruins of Mayo Abbey. Maigh Eo means “plain of the Yew trees” – the Yew being a tree that's often associated with churches and abbeys.

County Mayo came under Norman control in 1235ad – and this Norman control meant the demise of many Gaelic lords and chieftains, chiefly the O'Connors of Connacht.

During the 1230s, the Normans under Richard Burke invaded and settled the area introducing new families such as Burke, Gibbons, Barrett, Staunton, Prendergast, Walsh, Morris, Joyce, Costello and P rice. These Norman names are still common in County Mayo.

Like Galway – County Mayo was formed with the breakup of Connaught in 1556.

I'll see you next week! :)

Slán, Mike...

Letter 7 – A Letter to the People of Ireland

December 1, 2013

Céad Míle Failte wherever you are - from County Cork on a nice winter's morning. We're looking forward to going out for a hike later on the Sheep's Head peninsula (and getting a few photos!). I hope your day is starting and going well wherever you are.

If you are living in the USA - I guess your head is just about clearing ;) as the Thanksgiving holiday and weekend draws to a close! I do hope you had a good break and time with family and friends.

LETTER TO MICHAEL D. HIGGINS - PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

A few weeks back, I proposed that we send a letter to Michael D. Higgins - a letter through him to the people in Ireland. And we received some truly wonderful thoughts, feelings and sentiments.

More at www.youririshheritage.com

Here is what happens next:

- On Friday, December 6th - I will post the letter to President Higgins from the General Post Office in Dublin, the scene of the Easter Rising in 1916.
- It will contain a "composite letter" and all the individual letters that you have sent on.

Let's see what happens next!

I have included the composite letter below also. Now, I know it's not perfect (!) - but I wanted to capture the many thoughts and feelings found in your individual letters and try to use the original words as much as possible - and do so in a single page:

President Michael D. Higgins,

November 30th,

2013

Áras an Uachtaráin,
Phoenix Park,
Dublin 8.

Dear President Higgins,

We are the readers of “Your Irish Heritage”. Though we may number only in thousands, we feel our sentiments represent the tens of millions of people of Irish descent throughout the world. A particular line from your inaugural address struck us: “It is my wish to be a President for all of the Irish at home and abroad”. We wonder many things – but above all we wonder if the Irish think about their lost relatives like we think about them?

Although many of our ancestors did not return to the turf of Ireland since they left in the 1700s, during the Great Hunger – and even later - a love of its history and culture live on through us. They left Ireland as young men and women – never able to return. It saddens us that many Irish people had to leave during those times "because." Because is a big word. They left because everything they owned was taken from them; they left because they were being persecuted; they left because they refused to die. This experience has affected our sense of the history of Ireland – perhaps in a way that many who still live on the Island of Ireland cannot understand.

And when they came to their new country, they brought their wonderful gifts of humour and determination and used these gifts to

make the world a better place. Our parents and grandparents had to live their Irish Heritage through the stories, songs and lullabies that were passed down through their families. Now we have the Internet which has helped many of us to realise, for the first time, just how Irish we really are. Something gets into your blood when you are able to trace your ancestors and connect with their world.

Some of us have the good fortune to visit Ireland on a regular basis – for many of us it is the trip of a lifetime. For many more, the means to visit Ireland will never be forthcoming. But somehow, the connection remains intact. For some of us, the strangest feeling is of being Irish, but “not” Irish. When we meet Irish people we can feel such joy – but also something akin to grief at the disconnection. The Mexican-American writer Richard Rodriguez called it "the hunger of memory" and I think it pertains to many descendants of your "Diaspora."

We have our homes, families and communities in many parts of the world but maintain such family pride in our Irish heritage. We are truly blessed to be part of the history of your beautiful country. We fervently hope that Ireland, in recovering from financial recession, will regain and preserve her ancient culture and her people's warmth and generosity.

So, in closing President Higgins, we wonder of your feelings about us – the people of the Irish Diaspora spread throughout the world. Do the people on the Island of Ireland think about their lost relatives the way we think about them?

***Yours Most Warmly and Sincerely,
The Readers of Your Irish Heritage.***

So, do hit REPLY and let me know of the thoughts and feelings going through your mind as you read this! Which part speaks for you the most?

That's it for now!

Slán, Mike... talk next week! :)

Letter 8 – The McCartneys of the Mull of Kintyre

December 8, 2013

Céad Míle Fáilte from County Cork. I hope you are starting, and having, a good day wherever you are. The mornings are getting very dark around here as winter deepens – I need a bit of kick-start these mornings, so I've definitely moved onto the coffee!

We just got back last night from a trip to Dublin – we had an important job to do (more on that later in the letter), but we did get some time to catch up with friends and family. On Friday evening we were all kicking back in front of the fire and the telly - as you do - and on come “the Christmas number 1's of years gone by”. Great stuff.

Before we know it, we're all singing along to the 1977 Christmas Number 1 – “Mull of Kintyre” by Paul McCartney and Wings. Do you know it? Great – all together now:

“Mull of Kintyre, oh mist rolling in from the sea my desire”

MULLING OVER THE SURNAME MCCARTNEY.

Coincidences do happen. Earlier that day, I got a question from one of our readers - Kenneth McCartney – he asked:

“Hi, trying to find some relatives in Northern Ireland. The McCartney family settled in Ireland from Scotland in 1621. Theophilus McCartney immigrated to Canada in the 1871. What tribe would we be with?”

Before we give Kenneth his specific answer - it's worth opening this up a little. A lot of questions come my way around the movements between Ireland and Scotland over the centuries.

The Mull of the Kintyre peninsula is in Argyll in Western Scotland. You can see the coastline of Antrim clearly from there. Kintyre is thought to have been the entry point for the earliest humans in their travels into Ireland about 10,000 years ago.

About 1600 years ago it was used as a route by the people the Romans called the Scotti (the Roman name for the branch of the Irish - which gave Scotland its name) when as they spread from Ireland to establish the kingdom of Dál Riata between the tips of Ulster and Argyll in Scotland.

So – Kintyre has seen a lot of coming and goings over the years between Ireland and Scotland. This bouncing back and forward over centuries has provoked many questions from our readers – many

who ask “Is my surname Irish or Scottish?”

But let’s go back to the surname McCartney and Kenneth’s question.

My straight answer is – I don’t know for sure! The internet, and many books, are full of stories that people present as facts - and insist on them being correct. I think it is more useful to have an open mind - and be prepared to entertain a number of possibilities.

Let me give you a couple of these possibilities – and you can decide which works best for you!

One of the stories you will hear about the surname McCartney is that:

“The McCartneys are a branch of the great family of McCarthys in Munster in the south of Ireland. The fifth son of Cormac Fionn McCarthy was Donogh Cartnach who is the ancestor of the McCartneys. Donough Cartnach left 2 sons, the eldest Donal served under Robert the Bruce's of Scotland and received a grant of land in Argyllshire, called 'Glen Artney' from the King of Scotland in the 1200s.

Some of Donal's descendants later moved to Galloway. From there George Macartney emigrated to Ulster from Scotland in the 1600s. He is the original ancestor of many of the families of Macartney in Ulster and Ireland. He bought the property of Lissanoure in 1649 near Cloughmills Co. Antrim.” (Source – Wikipedia).

Now – wouldn't that be a nice story to believe!

One the other hand:

"McCartney is cognate with the Irish surname McCartan. McCartan is derived from Mac Artáin, which denotes the son of Artán (Artan is a diminutive version of the surname Art) – and was the surname was taken by chiefs of Kinelarty in County Down. The McCartans belong to the Uí Echach Cobo branch of the Dál nAraidi dynasty of the Cruthin." (Source – Wikipedia).

This suggests that a branch of the McCartans moved to Scotland at some time OR share a common ancestor.

Now, I know I'm being a bit of a devil by suggesting that the source for both of these is Wikipedia – but you do need to be careful of what you read on the internet - especially on Wikipedia!

So, back to Kenneth's question: Which tribe do the McCartneys belong to?

Well – they could have been originally "Eoghanacht" (McCarthy's of Munster) OR the Dal nAraidi (which ironically were a Cruthin tribe who originally came from the east coast of Scotland!).

Of course, when they travelled to Scotland they become part of the Clan Mackintosh.

Gets complicated – doesn't it! On the other hand - maybe we should

write to Paul McCartney and ask him what he has found out. Maybe he could even write a song about it for us!

Letter 9 – The County Cork “Red Herring”

December 29, 2013

Céad Míle Failte from County Cork – our last Sunday before the New Year! It’s nice and calm and frosty here at the moment – a real relief after the storm winds of the last few days.

I’m having a cup of straight coffee at the moment (the letter this morning involves numbers and calculations!) – I hope you take the time to join me now with your own nice cup of tea or coffee.

This morning we are going to take a look at some trends on our list of surnames – AND keep it interesting (fingers crossed!).

4600 IRISH SURNAMES

When people subscribe to this letter for the first time, I invite you to

More at www.youririshheritage.com

send on the Irish surnames in your family tree and the counties they last lived in (if you know).



Bandon, County Cork

This has resulted in a list of over 4600 surnames to date. And it's starting to get VERY interesting – trends and facts are emerging from the list. And that's what I want to start sharing with you now.

More at www.youririshheritage.com

THE COUNTY CORK “RED HERRING”?

OK – right away, it’s important to mention that over 95% of our readers come from outside Ireland. They mostly have an ancestor (or two) who left Ireland over the past four centuries and brought their Irish surname with them to Canada, the USA, Argentina, Australia, England, Scotland, New Zealand and so on!

Many of our readers (maybe you?) have actively tracked these ancestors and patiently filled in the family tree over the past number of years.

So, this morning, I want to tackle a trend from our list that may be of interest to you if you are one of these people!

I call this trend the *“County Cork Red Herring”*.

Let me explain. When I look at our list, I see that about 18% of all the names provided by our readers give County Cork as the County last lived in. Now, this number seems high as there are 32 counties in Ireland (do the maths!).

To put it in context – if there are about 36 million US citizens today who declare themselves of Irish descent – this means that 6.5 million of those have county Cork prominently in their family tree.

LET’S DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

More at www.youririshheritage.com

However, when I look at the list of “Cork” names given for our list, I notice that many of these names are very typical for Cork – but many names are VERY unusual for Cork. Ireland is like that – you can track the origin of a lot of our surnames.

Let me illustrate:

Here is a list of ALL of the “County Cork” names given by our readers (maybe your surname is here):

Ahearn/Aheren/Ahern Allen Barr Barrett Barron Barry Bartley
Beatty Bergen Bluit Bolger Brady Brannelly Bransfield Brennan
Brogan Brown Browne Buckley Burdin Burke Byrnes

Cahill Cain Callanan Camier Cantey Carey Carmody Carrigan Carroll
Carter Casey Cashman Cassidy Cavanaugh Clancy Clarke Cleary
Cleland Coakley Coffee/Coffey Collins Comerford Condon Connell
Connery Connolly Connor/Connors Conway Coppinger Corbett
Corkery Corridan Costigan Cotter Cottom Coughlan Coughlin Coyle
Creeden Cremin Cronin Crossen Crowe Crowley Culliton Cummings

Dabney Daly Daugherty Davis Deneen Dennehy Dennison Desmond
Deveney Doheny Donahoe Donahue Donohue Donovan Driscoll
Duffy Dugan Duggan Dunn Dwyer Early Eckley Egan Ellis Fane
Farmer Farrell Fegan Ferrigan FitzGerald Fitzpatrick Flaherty
Flanagan Fleming Fletcher Foley

Gaffney Gallagher Galligan Galway Gaughan Gerrity Gibbons Gill
 Gilleran Gilman Glavin Goggin Green Greer Griffin Haggerty
 Hallahan Haloran Haney Harrington Harris Hartigan Hawkes Hayes
 Healy Heard Heffernan Hegarty Hennessy Herlihy Hickey Holland
 Holohan Horgan Hourihan/Hourihane Howard Huey Hurley Irish
 Jeffers Jeffrey Joyce Joynt

Kearney Keefe Kelleher Kelley/Kelly Kennedy Kenny Keohane
 Kieley/Kiley King Kingston Kirk Lalley Landers Lane Lawless Leach
 Leahy Lee Lordan Luddy Lynch Lyons MacAuliffe MacDonald
 Madden Mahoney Malone Manning Mannix Marnell Martin
 McAninley McCann McCarthy/McCarty McCartney McCloskey
 McCormick McCotter McDermott McDevitt McGarry McGinn
 McGinnis McGlynn McGrath McGraw McIntyre McKenzie
 McLaughlin McMahan McThreinfer Meehan Mehegan Mohally
 Molloy Moran Morey Morrissey Moynahan Mulcahy Mulchinaugh
 Mulchinock Mullarkey Mullen Mullins Murphy Murray

Nally Neely Newman Noonan Nugent O'Brian/O'Brien/O'Bryan
 O'Callaghan O'Colmain O'Connell O'Conner O'Connor O'Cronin
 O'Donnell O'Donovan O'Driscoll O'Flaherty O'Halloran O'Hearn
 O'Herrons O'Kaye O'Keefe O'Lalley O'Leary O'Mahony O'Malley
 O'Neil/O'Neill/O'Niell O'Rourke O'Shea O'Sullivan O'Tuama

Parker Pension Phelan Phillips Power Poythrus Price Quinlan Quinn
 Quirk Reardon Regan Riley Riordan Roach/Roche Rogers Ryan Rylee
 Saunders Savage Scanlan Shea Shearin Sheehan Sisk Slattery Smith
 Snee Stanton Steele Stewart Stone Sullivan Sweeney Taylor Terry

Thomas Toohy Tooker Toomey Tracey Tuckey Walsh Ward Whalen
White Wholey Winters

Now, here is my breakdown of that list into three parts:

1. Surname VERY Typical in Cork

Ahearn/Aheren/Ahern Allen Barrett Barry Buckley Cahill Camier
Cantey Carey Collins Comerford Condon Connolly Coppinger Cotter
Coughlan Coughlin Creeden Cremin Cronin Crowley Deneen
Dennehy Desmond Donahoe/Donahue/Donohue Donovan Driscoll
Dugan/Duggan FitzGerald Fleming Foley Haloran Harrington Hayes
Healy Hennessy Herlihy Hickey Horgan Hourihan/Hourihane Hurley
Jeffers Keefe Kelleher Keohane Kingston Leahy Lee Lordan Lynch
Lyons MacCarthy MacAuliffe Mahoney Manning Mannix
McCarthy/McCarty McCotter Moynahan Murphy Nugent
O'Brian/O'Brien/O'Bryan O'Callaghan O'Connell O'Cronin
O'Donovan O'Driscoll O'Halloran O'Keefe O'Leary O'Mahony O'Shea
O'Sullivan O'Tuama Phelan Reardon/Riordan Regan Roach/Roche
Savage Sheehan Sullivan Sweeney Toohy Toomey Walsh

2. Surname SOMEWHAT Typical in Cork

Barr Brady Brown Browne Burke Callanan Carmody Carroll Casey
Cashman Cavanaugh Clancy Coakley Coffee/Coffey Comerford
Connell Connor/Connors Conway Corkery Costigan Culliton Daly
Dunn Dwyer Egan Flaherty Gaffney Glavin Goggin Griffin Hartigan
Hawkes Heffernan Hegarty Kearney Kelley Kelly Kennedy Kieley

Kiley Lane Martin McGrath McMahon Mulcahy Mullen Mullins
 Newman Nugent O'Conner/O'Connor O'Flaherty
 O'Neil/O'Neill/O'Niell O'Rourke Phillips Power Quinlan Quinn Quirk
 Ryan Shea Shearin Slattery Smith Stanton Whalen Winters

3. Surname UNUSUAL in Cork

Barron Bartley Beatty Bergen Bluitt Bolger Brannelly Bransfield
 Brennan Brogan Burdin Byrnes Cain Carrigan Carter Cassidy Clarke
 Cleary Cleland Comerford Connery Corbett Corridan Cottom Coyle
 Crossen Crowe Cummings Dabney Daugherty Davis Dennison
 Deveney Doheny Duffy Early Eckley Ellis Fane Farmer Farrell Fegan
 Ferrigan Fitzpatrick Flanagan Fletcher Gallagher Galligan Galway
 Gaughan Gerrity Gibbons Gill Gilleran Gilman Green Greer Haggerty
 Hallahan Haney Harris Heard Holland Holohan Howard Huey Irish
 Jeffrey Joyce Joynt Kenny King Kirk Lalley Landers Lawless Leach
 Luddy MacDonald Madden Malone Marnell McAninley McCann
 McCartney McCloskey McCormick McDermott McDevitt McGarry
 McGinn McGinnis McGlynn McGraw McIntyre McKenzie McLaughlin
 McThreinfer Meehan Mehegan Mohally Molloy Moran Morey
 Morrissey Mulchinaugh Mulchinock Mullarkey Murray Nally Neely
 Noonan Nugent O'Colmain O'Donnell O'Hearn O'Herrons O'Kaye
 O'Lalley O'Malley Parker Pension Poythrus Price Riley Rogers Rylee
 Saunders Scanlan Sisk Snee Steele Stewart Stone Taylor Terry
 Thomas Tooker Tracey Tuckey Ward White Wholey

As you can see, that last list of names (unusual in Cork) is a very long one. Now – I may not be 100% accurate on this – but I would say I

am 85% plus ;)

But – these are names that readers believe are names of their ancestors that come from Cork.

So, what is going on?

Well, I don't want to jump to many firm conclusions yet – but my guess is that the port of Queenstown (Cobh) has a lot to do with it. Queenstown/Cobh was probably the most important exit port of many of Ireland's emigrants. Over a million people left there over hundreds of years.

And many of these emigrants may have informed their families that County Cork was the place they came from (which was true in a way).

So, if you are a little “suspicious” as to whether your ancestors actually lived in County Cork – their actual surname is a good clue. And then track down that surname to the part of Ireland where it is prevalent and you may break down a brick wall or two in your genealogy research.

As I mentioned - this is only a theory of mine at the moment - and I will keep digging. What do you think?

That's it for now!

Slán, Mike... talk next week! :)

Letter 10 – Christmas Time in Ireland

December 22, 2013

Céad Míle Failte from County Cork. I hope the weather isn't too extreme wherever you are (whenever I mention the local weather here in Ireland – it seems that at least 10% of our readers are experiencing some calamitous climate event where they are!)

It was great to hear from so many readers in response to last week's newsletter - so many new names and stories. It took me until Wednesday to reply to them all! Thank you so much for sharing.

I'm having a nice cup of Barry's tea at the moment – I hope you take the time to join me now with your own nice cup of tea or coffee.

CHRISTMAS IN IRELAND

More at www.youririshheritage.com

It's really feeling like Christmas around here at the moment! People are smiling more and starting to connect again with old friends and family members they may not have seen in a while. Our own son, Evan, returned home from England on Friday night so Christmas has definitely started on a good footing in our house!

I was asking Carina the other night about her memories of Christmas as a child. She grew up in a country shop but also spent a lot of time in her grandparent's farm in rural north Cork. There were two lovely memories that came to her in remembering her Christmas.

The first was the feeling of being on a farm. The feeling of being close to the animals – well, she could have been in Bethlehem itself! Granddad O'Donoghue always made sure that the animals had a little extra food on a Christmas Eve – it just seemed like the right thing to do. And as they were out there, they looked up into the dark open sky, hoping to see one star a little brighter than all the others – and her granddad always managed to find her one!

Coming down from the animals toward the kitchen door - she remembers the glow of a single candle there in the window. A light and symbol of shelter and comfort – and the feeling of home.

"There will always be room for the night and a welcome in this house" - she remembers her grandmother saying as she lit this candle each night over Christmas.



1 A Christmas Candle in the Window

In 1997, Mary Robinson – the President of Ireland at the time – started a tradition of lighting a candle in the kitchen window of the Áras an Uachtaráin (the president's residence). She did it to signify the connection with all of the people of Irish Heritage and descent throughout the world.

She wanted to let all Irish people around the world (whatever your "percentage") know that we are thinking of them - and there will ALWAYS be a welcome here in Ireland.

So, tonight Carina and myself will be lighting a candle in the kitchen window of our own home - a candle of friendship and welcome - for all the readers of Your Irish Heritage. Especially for you.

More at www.youririshheritage.com

Wishing you and your family a very Happy Christmas,

Nollaig Shona Duit,
Mike and Carina.