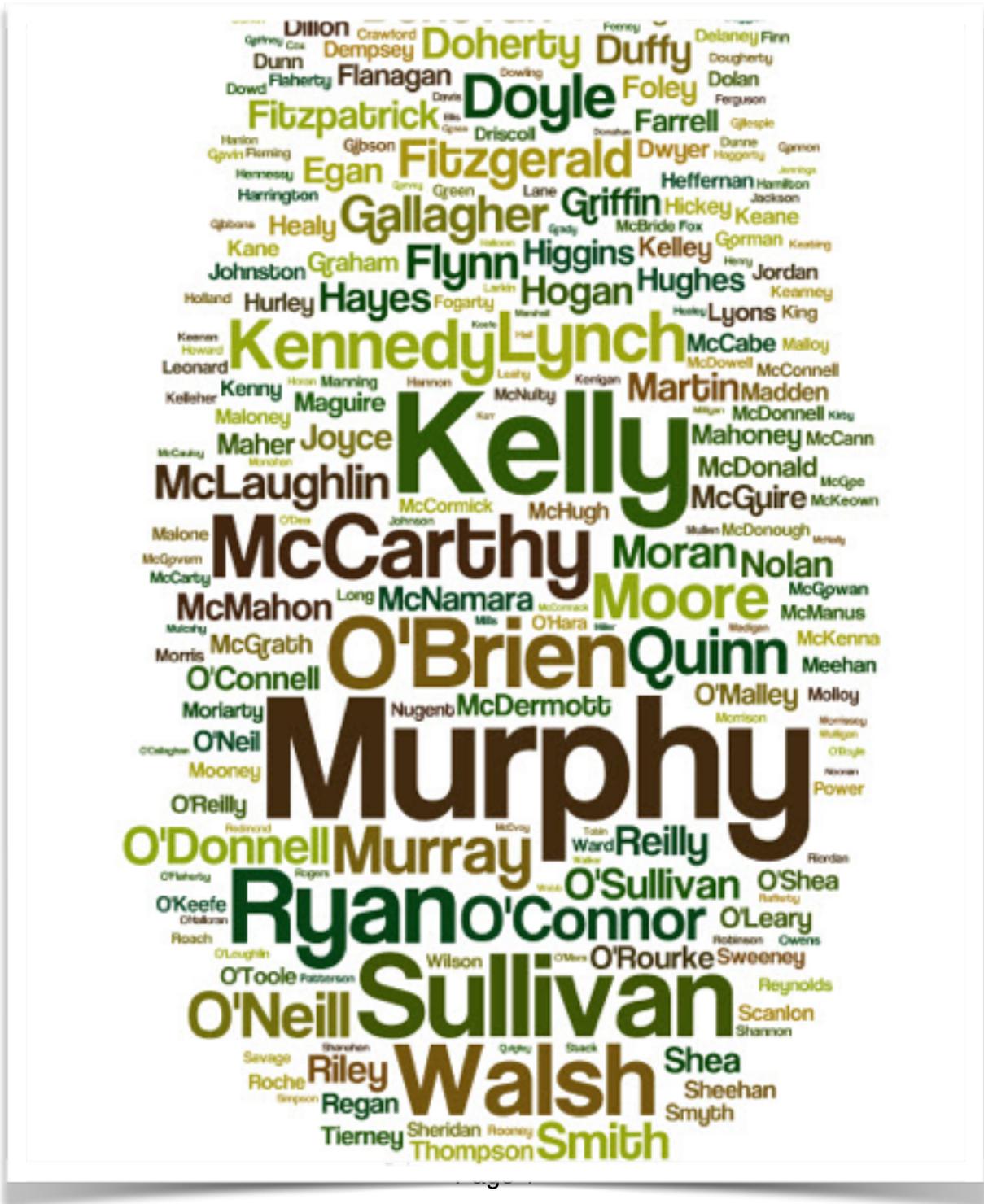


Irish Surnames

Solve the Riddle Of Your Irish Surnames - in Nine Easy Pieces!



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**Solve The Riddle Of Your Irish Surnames - In Nine
Easy Pieces!**

By Mike Collins

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Copied - But Feel Free To Forward It To Your Friends
And Family - Sound Fair?**

Contact Mike Collins

Mike@YourIrishHeritage.Com

Twitter: @MikeyourIrish

Introduction.

Hello there - or as we say in Ireland "Cèad Mìle Fàilte" - A Hundred Thousand Welcomes!

My name is Mike Collins - and that is my wife, Carina, you see in the picture beside me. Between us, we run "Your Irish Heritage" - a community focused on helping the 40 Million plus people of Irish descent all around the world, bring their Irish Ancestry to Life!



We are based in County Cork in Ireland, and spend our time wandering around Ireland, picking up stories, taking pictures - and sharing them back on Your Irish Heritage - both on our Blog, in our books and through a weekly "Letter from Ireland" that now goes out to about 15,000 people around the world.

In this short 50 page book, we wanted to bring together 9 "Letters from Ireland" that would help you "decode" and "decipher" some of the mysteries behind the Irish surnames in your family tree.

Each "lesson" is in the form of a letter - with a little history, explanation and a local story, or two, thrown in also. So, whether you have an Ahern from Cork, a Connolly from Monaghan, an O'Flaherty from Galway, or an Anderson from Antrim in your tree - I do hope that you will find the letters informing, educational and if so - do feel free to pass it on to your friends and family who may also be interested.

Connect With Us - And Bring Your Irish Ancestry To Life:

If you enjoy this book and it's contents, here are a few different ways that you can connect with us - and tell us a little more about the Irish surnames in your family tree.

Weekly Letter from Ireland: You may have received this booklet because you are already signed up for our **free weekly "Letter from Ireland"**, but if not, you can sign up for free here: <http://eepurl.com/xPw4P>

Our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/YourIrishHeritage/>

Our Blog: <https://youririshheritage.com/>

Letter from Ireland Books: The Letter from Ireland books are available to purchase on Amazon here: <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00XJ0E8WO/>

Our Special Members Area, The Green Room - Find out more here: <https://youririshheritage.com/join-green-room/>

Whichever you decide, we will be delighted to make your acquaintance!

Slàn for now,

Mike Collins.

1. Which Part Of The Irish Diaspora Are You From?

Céad Míle Fáilte - and I hope you are keeping well on what is a lovely summer morning here in County Cork. Everyone seems to be heading away on their "holliers" (as we say in Cork) in these parts - and we are due to head off ourselves this week to the wonderful Dingle Peninsula in County Kerry.

I'm having a cup of Lyons tea this morning - and I do hope you'll have a cup of whatever you enjoy and join me for this morning's letter.

Which Part Of The Irish Diaspora Are You From?

Don't you just love that word - "Diaspora"? Apparently, it comes from the Greek word for "scattering".

The reason I bring this up today is because Ireland has appointed it's very first "Minister for the Diaspora" - Jimmy Deenihan.

I first remember the word being used in the context of an "Irish Diaspora" when President Mary Robinson used to light a candle of welcome each night in all the windows of the presidential residence. A symbol of



guidance and welcome for people of Irish descent spread throughout the world.

Now there are about 80 million people around the world who claim significant Irish descent. Quite amazing for such a small country as ours!

The following is a rough breakdown of where we find our Irish today:

- **USA** - about 36 Million people identify themselves as primarily of Irish descent. One of the things that surprised me when I started Your Irish Heritage was just how many readers we have of Scotch-Irish descent (and that is a subject coming soon in a Letter from Ireland!) - about 20% of all our readers.

- **Canada** - about 4.5 million of Irish descent. Most Irish headed to Canada from the 19th century famine all the way to the 1950s. Even today, Canadian companies turn up in Ireland each year in quantity to recruit whole families of skilled tradesmen to all sorts of infrastructure and mining projects across the country.

- **South American countries** claim high Irish descent populations - 2.5% in Argentina and 3.6% in Uruguay. The majority of these are descendants of the families of soldiers who first left Ireland as

"Wild Geese" to fight with the Spanish armies - and followed them onto the colonies. People like William Brown from County Mayo - the founder of the Argentinian Navy.

- **Australia** - Just over 10% of the Australian population self-declare as being of Irish ancestry. I am always struck by the stories that come from our



Australian readers. Many of their ancestors arrived in the colony as convicted criminals - and the story around their conviction was often captured in court proceedings back in Ireland. And harrowing stories they are too.

- **Great Britain** - has about 10% of it's population is of Irish descent. Our US readers often question how Irish people could go and live in Britain. The answer is simple - job prospects and that is often where their family and friends already reside. My own parents moved to Britain. I was born there. We all moved back to Ireland. I went back to work there for a short while. My own son now works there. That is the way it has been for many centuries.



So, if you were passing on advice to our new Minister for the Diaspora - Jimmy Deenihan - what would you say? What questions would you have for him?

In the meantime, thank you so much much for being a part of the Your Irish Heritage community - I think we have become a living example of just how people of Irish descent around the world can connect together.

That's it for now!

Slán, Mike... talk next week! :)

2. Bobby McGee And The Real Mccoy.

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. First up:

The Name Is McGee – And Don't Call Me Bobby!

I got an email from Mary McGee - she asked:

"I met a lady called McCoy last year - she insisted we are distant cousins - how could that be?"

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!

The First Surnames.

Next, June MacCarthy got in touch - she asked "why do YOU write MacCarthy 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 hIcidhe) 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 just abbreviations.



Losing The Os And Macs – And Getting Them Back.

Mary Sullivan contacted me - she 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 its 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...

3. Where Does Your Irish Surname Really Come From?

Céad Míle Fáilte - and welcome once again to your very own Letter from Ireland. The clocks "sprang forward" last night, so I guess we are now officially in summer time here in County Cork. I do wish someone would tell the weather which is behaving in a very agitated manner.

I hope the weather, and life, is treating you well today wherever you may be in the world. I have nice cup of Lyons tea on the go here, and I do hope you'll have a cup of whatever you fancy as we start into today's letter.



One of the things I am really enjoying at the moment is taking Letters from last year, adding lots of pictures - and posting them over on our "blog". You can [see our latest one here on The Tribes of Galway](#).

What do you think? Maybe one of your family names is mentioned?

What If Your Family Name Comes From Lots Of Places In Ireland?

Do you know where your family name comes from in Ireland? We all like a bit of certainty, don't we? There are many Irish names that come from very specific parts of Ireland, and even today you will find those names in great quantity only in those parts.

On the other hand, there are names like Murphy, O'Neill, MacMahon, O'Carroll, Kennedy and so on - they are found in a number of places in Ireland, all distinct from one another. This can make it a little tricky when you need to use a surname alone to trace back to the likely county, and place of departure, for your ancestor.

And so it is with Sandy Laferriere. Sandy, one of our Green Room members, contacted me with the following a few weeks back:



"I have wondered about my Irish Heritage for years. My Mum never wanted to talk about it much. In her childhood, no one to tell her all the wonderful stories of beautiful Ireland, the people and of her grandparents. Her great grandparents came from Londonderry in 1853 to St. John, New Brunswick, Canada. Their names were Thomas and Elizabeth (Reid) Kennedy. They came with 7 children, the youngest was just 9 months old, Alexander.

How I wish I knew more of their life and story in Ireland. Twice I have been to Ireland. I felt I had somehow returned home. Maybe one day I can go back and have time to find the spot my great great Grandparents were born, where they played as children, grew up, and married. Maybe I can find some cousins!"

Sandy Laferriere.

Well, Sandy - Kennedy is one of those names I mentioned earlier. It can come from a number of places in Ireland - but what about your Kennedys?

A Very Popular Nickname In It's Day.

The surname Kennedy is the anglicised form of the Irish name "Ó Cinneide" which is based on a nickname that loosely translates as "fierce head". It was probably a desirable nickname to have on the field of battle. This nickname seems to have been in use across much of Ireland, as well as in parts of Gaelic-speaking Scotland, before surnames were first "locked-in" from the 800s onwards.

One holder of the nickname was a member of the Dal gCais tribe that came out of what is now modern County Clare in the 800s. His descendants decided to adopt his name "descendants of old Fierce head", or "Ó Cinneide", when they chose a collective surname.

This group later became known as the Kennedys, and mostly settled in, and ruled, a portion of north Tipperary for hundreds of years. A branch of the family also headed off to County Wexford, which is where John F. Kennedy's family came from many hundreds of years later.



Meanwhile, there was another "fierce headed one" up on the east side of the Inishowen peninsula in County Donegal, and his descendants decided to adopt his nickname as surname. These Kennedys ruled on the east side of that

peninsula under the O'Dohertys - just above where Derry/Londonderry is today - for hundreds of years.

Finally, the name "Cinneide" was made immortal over in Galloway in Scotland around the same time by yet another family group. This group of Scottish Kennedys became an officially recognised Scottish clan - and it is believed that they came from Ireland originally, but I'm not sure of the evidence for that.

Sometimes, It Is All About Religion.

So, what about Sandy and her ancestor? Well, given the name Kennedy - it's always possible that her ancestors came from Tipperary originally, just unlikely as they used Londonderry as a port of departure. I then asked Sandy the question, what religion were they? Most likely Presbyterian it turned out.

If Sandy had said Roman Catholic, there would have been a strong chance that her family were from the local Gaelic Kennedys of the Inishowen peninsula. But as she gave Presbyterian, these are most likely the Kennedys who originated in Scotland and arrived in Ireland in great numbers from the 1600s onwards.



It's possible that the families of Thomas Kennedy and Elizabeth Reid were in that part of Ulster for hundreds of years by the time they decided to head for Canada. But, I guess we're going to have to do a little more digging to find out more.

At the moment, I'm writing a new "Tribes of Ireland" Book - this time set in 1649AD. It was a time when Ireland was made up of Irish Gaels, Anglo Norman families, as well as the early English and Scottish settlers. The counties that we know today were in place, but the country was about to change forever with the imminent arrival of one Oliver Cromwell.

At that time, here were the main family names in County Donegal - including the O'Kennedy clan:

Irish Gaelic names:

Hughes MacCoyle
MacCrossan MacDevaney
MacDever MacDevitt
MacDonlevy MacFadden
MacGee MacGillespie
MacGlinchy MacGonnigle
MacGrath MacLoughlin
MacNellis MacNulty



MacSweeney MacTernon MacWard MacWard McRoarty O'Begley O'Boyle
O'Breslin O'Brollaghan O'Cannon O'Clery O'Corran O'Deeney O'Dermond
O'Doherty O'Donnell O'Donnelly O'Duffy O'Dugan O'Dullaghan O'Farren
O'Friel O'Gallagher O'Gormley O'Harkin O'Hogan O'Kennedy O'Kenny
O'Kernaghan O'Laverty O'Loony O'Lynch O'Mulhall O'Mullholland
O'Mulligan O'Murray O'Pattan O'Quinn O'Shields O'Toner

English/Scottish Settler names: Blake Bodkin Browne Campbell MacIntyre
Morrisson Murray Ross

Are any of your Irish surnames here? So, a big thank you to Sandy for sharing origins of her ancestors today - and we do look forward to getting updates as she uncovers more about the O'Kennedy Clan of Ireland, and one O'Kennedy family in particular. Slán for now, Mike and Carina :)

4. A Tale Of Nine Irish Surnames

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?

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:

Name 1: Eaton – Emigrated From County Kerry.

This is an English surname derived from a placename 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 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!



Name 2: Keane – Emigrated From County Waterford.

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.

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

Name 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.

Name 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 whos 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.



Name 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.

Name 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 placename.

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.

Name 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 a 1000 years ago) 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'Suilleabhain 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?

Name 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.

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...

5. One Irish Name Spelled Two Different Ways

Céad Míle Fáilte - and welcome to this week's Letter from Ireland. We're just back from a family reunion yesterday, which we spent on a beach in West Cork. Now, that's Irish optimism for you - planning for party on a beach in Ireland - but the weather was beautiful, isn't it great when things work out?

I hope you are doing well wherever this letter finds you in the world today. I'm having a nice cup of Lyon's tea this morning as we chat, so I do hope you'll have a cup of whatever you fancy yourself as we start into the letter.



An Irish Name Spelled Two Ways.

Have you ever been frustrated when you see an Irish surname spelled many different ways? I'm sure you have one or two of these in your Irish family tree.

One of our readers, Chris Grissom, asked the following:

"I have found there are several convergences of "Meagher" and "Maher" in researching my family. This is a specific brick wall for me. How likely would it be for the names to be interchanged in Ireland?"

Noreen Maher (one of our Green Room genealogists) had a specific interest in this subject given her own surname. She replied as follows:

"The surname can be spelt both ways but it seems that different branches seemed to have taken one or the other! I would say that the spelling 'Meagher' is rarely found outside of Tipperary while the name Maher is plentiful in Tipperary but also found in Waterford and Kilkenny."

Thanks for that, Chris and Noreen. But let's not leave it there. Let's tuck these facts under our arm and head off on a journey of discovery around one man who happened to go by the surname of "Meagher".

You see, Meagher is one of those surnames that has become associated with County Tipperary, Waterford City, St. Johns in Newfoundland, the leadership of the Young Irelander movement, Van Diemens Land, education in New York City, leading the Irish Brigade during the American Civil War, the governance of Montana and the hoisting of the very first Irish tri-colour flag.

That's quite a set of associations for one Irish surname! However, the most interesting thing is that we are not talking just about the wider Meagher clan, but one particular Meagher family - and most of the time about one particular man.

Meet Thomas Francis Meagher.

From Tipperary To Van Diemens Land.

If you ever travel to the north of County Tipperary, you'll come across the town of Roscrea. Around this town lies the old Irish kingdom of Éile, part of which was ruled by the "Ò Meachair" - a name that became anglicised as O'Meagher and O'Maher over time. The Meaghers were unusual, as they held their territory against the Normans and ruled the area well into the mid 1600s.

Thomas Meagher was born in the area in 1763AD, but made his way to the port of Waterford and from there to St. John's in Newfoundland by the close of the 18th century. Waterford and Newfoundland developed close ties over the decades, as so many men left Waterford to fish in the area - sometimes seasonally and sometimes to settle. Thomas Meagher was one of those settlers, and advanced from farmer to trader to ship-owner - he then went on to establish a successful trading connection between St. John's and Waterford City.

The business was so successful, that he sent his eldest son, Thomas, back to Waterford to oversee the interests of his company. Thomas junior settled in Waterford, married Elizabeth Quan/Quaine - and they had five children together.

They named their eldest boy Thomas Francis Meagher.

So, Thomas Francis was born into a wealthy trading family - and achieved an education to match in Dublin and England. Over those years, he developed a skill for oratory that would be put to good use in the causes he became associated with over the coming years.



First up was the "Young Ireland" movement - a group in Ireland that looked for independence from the United Kingdom. It was during this time that Meagher and his friends flew the new green, white and orange Irish tricolour flag from the roof of a building in Waterford City for the first time. In the words of Meagher:

"The white in the centre signifies a lasting truce between the 'orange' and the 'green', and I trust that beneath it's folds the hands of the Irish Protestant and the Irish Catholic may be clasped in generous and heroic brotherhood."

Shortly afterwards, Meagher and his friends were charged with treason and sentenced to be "hung, drawn and quartered". However, this sentence was commuted to transportation to Van Diemens Land (modern Tasmania in Australia). He stayed there for all of two years, escaped and had the means to travel to New York City where he studied Law and journalism - eventually becoming a lecturer and US citizen.



From The Irish Brigade To Montana.

He also became a captain in the New York militia, and by the time of the onset of the US Civil War in 1861, started to recruit New York Irish into a new Irish branch of the militia. In 1862, he was made a Brigadier-General of the Union army, and went on the form a new "Irish Brigade". At the onset of the civil war, many Irish men were torn between supporting the confederates in their bid for independence (they could empathise with that), or preserving a Union that offered personal freedoms that they had sought for so long. One of the aims in forming the Irish Brigade was to solidify Irish support behind the Union. Meagher led the brigade into many battles until his resignation in 1863.

At the end of the war, he travelled to the Territory of Montana and was made acting-governor on his arrival. However, in July 1867, Thomas Francis

Meagher fell overboard from a steamer on the Missouri river while recovering from an illness. His body was never recovered.

Today, there is a statue of Meagher on horseback in front of the Montana state capitol building, and a similar statue in his original home city of Waterford, Ireland.

It seems to me that the journey of Meagher and his family through life reflects so much of the Irish journey over the past two hundred years. From tribal homelands, seasonal emigration overseas, participation in revolt, conviction, deportation, emigration and achieving public service overseas.



Maybe this is the story and journey of your Irish ancestors?

Today, you will see that same tricolour flag that was hoisted by Meagher and his friends over a Waterford building in 1848 - but this time it is flying freely over hundreds of Irish buildings.

That's it for this week, Slán, Mike and Carina :)

6. Have You Heard Your Name With An Irish Accent?

Céad Míle Fáilte - and welcome once again to your Letter from Ireland. All is well here in this little corner of County Cork - spring seems to be well on it's way. I hope you are getting some nice weather wherever you are in the world today.

Last Friday morning we had an eclipse of the sun. Quite a sight, as it was nice and sunny that morning here in Cork. Can you just imagine what our ancestors must have made of such a phenomena? Did you manage to catch any of the eclipse where you live?

I'm sitting down to a nice cup of Barry's tea as we chat - and I do hope you'll have a cup of whatever you fancy, and join me for today's Letter. However, before I go on - just to say thank you so

much for your comments and feedback on last week's Letter - where I asked you about Your Irish Ancestry Wishlist. Would you believe I am still going through all the answers and getting back to some people!

I guess the request hit a (positive) nerve for lots of people.



But now, onto today! Do you have a "strong accent"? How about the people around you? This morning we take a look at a request from one of our readers - and then consider the Irish accent.

How Many Irish Surnames In Your Family Tree?

I received the following request some time ago from one of our Green Room members:

"I have been receiving your "Letter From Ireland" for a few months & wonder if you can tell me anything about the name "Nilan" in terms of county of origin and what would be the best way to proceed with finding more information on my ancestors.

I lost my parents & siblings when I was younger so no way to trace through relatives...I've looked around on your blog in the various topics but I can't seem to find anything that would help me in my search. Thank you so much for your time"

Mary Nilan.

No problem at all Mary! However, for the benefit of all of our readers, we'll widen the answer out to cover a few extra topics - topics that come up frequently as we look at our Irish Ancestry.



You see, Nilan is one of those surnames that has a LOT of variations. This can make it quite confusing as you delve deeper into your familys past. Do you have a surname like that?

Nilan comes from the Irish "Ó Nialláin" - which is derived from the Irish first name "Niall". It literally means "descendant of the son of Niall". However, that was the original Irish.

Over the years English became more prevalent across the island of Ireland, and most of our names were "anglicised". This "anglicisation" took place from the late 17th century onwards, and by that time "Ó Nialláin" was found in a number of parts of the country. Much of the "anglicising" of Irish names was done phonetically - and depending where it was found, this depended on regional accents and other influences.

We'll come back to these variations and accents in a moment.

The source of the "Ó Nialláin" family name was from around the town of Ennis in the modern County Clare. They were part of the Dal gCais tribe who came to prominence in Ireland in the 900s. The first mention of the surname was in 1093 AD (Irish surnames were introduced much earlier than most other countries) - and was for one Phelim Ó Nialláin.

So Mary, that's your first-mentioned ancestor there!

The Ó Nialláins were a prominent family in that part of Clare over the following 700 years - and family members became Bishops of Kilfenora and Kildare, as well as extensive landholders. However, from the late 1600s onwards, life was changing drastically for Irish aristocratic families who chose to remain Roman Catholic.

Families such as the Ó Nialláins.

At that point, the family were known in English as the O'Neylans. Many of the sons of the more prominent families went to Europe as "Wild Geese" to

fight in the Austrian army of the time. Those who remained in Ireland mostly became landless tenants and wandering labourers - often forced north and west into the poorer lands of north Clare, Galway and Mayo.

When An Irish Surname Meets An Irish Accent.

The phonetic translation of the Irish surname "Ó Nialláin" into O'Neylan (pronounced Nail-ann) gives you an idea of the County Clare accent of the day. As the name travelled north into south County Galway, it became anglicised as "Nilan" and "Nylan" (pronounce "Nigh-lann") reflecting the County Galway accent. Even further north, in County Mayo - the name received a "d" at the end - and it became "Niland" and "Nyland" (they are very particular in Mayo!).



So, you could say that Mary Nilans surname came about as a particular Irish family fell into hard times - and was anglicised by the varied regional accents of the west of Ireland. As Mary's ancestors received the "Nilan" name, this most likely happened as they lived in south Galway (around Kinvarra) at the time the name became anglicised.

But, for all the variations of the name - Nilans, Neylans, Nylands, Nealons and so on - all of their Marys would still be written as "Máire Ní Nialláin" in the original tongue of her Irish ancestors.

Just said differently!

How about you? Do you have one of these Irish names that seem to have "57 varieties"?

Slán for now,

Mike and Carina :)

7. Is Your Irish Surname Buried In A Place Name?

Céad Míle Fáilte - and welcome to this week's Letter from Ireland. We're just back from a great trip to Tipperary. Yesterday was a typical Irish summers day - composed equally of squally showers, warm sunshine and more!

I hope you are doing well wherever this letter finds you in the world today and that life is treating you kindly. It's straight up water from the well for me this morning - but I do hope you'll have a cup of whatever you fancy yourself as we chat in today's letter.

Before I go on, I must mention the letter from last week - where I shared the amazing story of Tadhg O'Brennan from Kilkenny. Have you seen it? You can [read the full letter here](#).

What I love about receiving and sharing these stories is the way that our readers then add so much more to them. Have a look all the way near the end of the comments section and you will see a reply from one of our readers, Manan McLellan from Ontario.



Isn't his addition to the letter a real full circle? What do you think?

The reason we headed to County Tipperary yesterday was to track down the stories and places around the ancestors of one of our Green Room members - Lorraine Hannon from Australia.

Irish Surnames And Places.

We arrived in the Tipperary town of Thurles about 11.00am and it was already getting very busy. You see, Tipperary is one of the great Hurling counties of Ireland and this is Munster Final weekend - featuring Counties Tipperary and Waterford. There were also a lot of other matches being played in the local Semple stadium in the buildup to that main event later today (Sunday).

We were in search of the places and sights associated with the O'Fogarty family - so we were definitely in the right part of the country.

You see, the town of Thurles gets its name from the Irish "Durlas" - or more correctly "Durlas Éile Uí

Fhogartaigh" (now you understand why it was shortened to Durlas!). This means "strong fort of the O'Fogarty family of the Éile tribe".

That's the way it goes in Ireland. Many towns and placenames have this strong family association. However, the association is often buried through centuries of anglicisation.

The O'Fogartys were chiefs of this area of Tipperary before the coming of the Normans in the 12th century and remained a significant family over



subsequent centuries. As a result, even today, you will find the Fogarty surname concentrated in this area of Ireland around the towns of Templemore and Thurles - and quite rare in other areas of Ireland.

When the Normans did arrive - they imposed a feudal territorial system on the area within their power. They shired the County of Tipperary in 1210AD (one of the earliest in Ireland). The county was subsequently divided into "baronies", and these baronies later divided into "Civil Parishes" (terms probably familiar to you when tracing your Irish ancestors).

One of these baronies of Tipperary was called "Eliogarty" - which in typical fashion is how the Norman invaders might have heard what the Irish called the area - "Éile Uí Fhogartaigh" meaning "the land of the O'Fogartys of the tribe of the Éile".



So, the attachment of family and place is captured in many of the place names of Ireland - even though you may have to do a little digging under the layers of anglicisation that have taken place down through the centuries.

How about you? Do you have an Irish family name that also appears as an Irish place name?

Slán for this week, Mike and Carina :)

8. Do You Know The Nickname History Of Your Irish Surname?

Céad Míle Fáilte - and welcome to this weeks Letter from Ireland. Dare I say it, there is a taste of Spring in the air here in County Cork! While there is no sign of any growth in the plants and trees just yet, there is a definite "sweetness" in the air. I do hope the weather is treating you well wherever you are today.

I'm back on the Lyon's Tea - straight up - and I hope you'll have a cup of whatever you fancy yourself as you join me for today's Letter. In fact, you may wish to take a little picture "detour" as you have your cuppa. Here are some photos from last year on the Beara Peninsula - a place that we discuss in today's letter.

One other small order of business before we move on - we're getting some great entries into our Reader's story competition - and the closing date is January 31st! So, if you would still like to enter, do let me know as soon as possible.

Did You Ever Have A Nickname?

Have you ever had a nickname? In your family - or with your friends - or maybe in school? I remember many of my teachers by their nicknames. There was "Small Tobacco", "Seán Fada" (long John), "Birdie" and so on.

That's what we'll chat about this week - the relationship between the Irish surnames in your family tree and the use of nicknames among the more numerous families.

Following last week's letter on the Moriartys - I received the following from one William Romanski:

"In researching my ancestry in Killorglin, it has been interesting to find that there were so many Moriartys that different branches went by different nicknames. In Killorglin the common Moriarty branches were called 'Caulea' and 'Buony'.

The practice of these family nicknames seems to be falling out of use. In fact, it seems that it never even traveled with the Irish to the US."

Well, we did cover the Moriartys last week - so let's move on to another popular Irish surname to investigate this use of "nicknames". We will use the O'Sullivan surname to illustrate the relationship between nicknames and surnames in Ireland. Do you know any Sullivans? Maybe you have this name in your own family tree.

In The Beginning.

From about the sixth century, the leading tribe of Munster in southern Ireland were called the "Eoghanacht" and were based around Cashel in what is now County Tipperary. They took their name from one illustrious ancestor - "Eoghan" (pronounced Owen). The name Eoghan is a nickname - meaning "born of the Yew tree".

Over time, the Eoghanacht tribe split into a number of families and Septs - two of the most powerful were the McCarthys and the O'Sullivans. The O'Sullivans took their surname from



one of their illustrious ancestor who had the nickname "one-eye" or "hawk-eye". So, you could say that the surname O'Sullivan means "descendants of Hawkeye".

But time moved on - and the powerful Normans arrived on the scene in County Tipperary. They pushed the McCarthys and the O'Sullivans to the south-west of the island. There, the O'Sullivans further split up into a number of groups. There were the O'Sullivan Mór who settled around Kenmare and into the Ring of Kerry, and the O'Sullivan Bere who settled on the Beara Peninsula.

Now, let's pause for a moment. What has this got to do with nicknames? Well, think about it. Imagine if a large group of people who all carry the same surname moved into your neighbourhood? As well as that, they all seem to have the same first names. There's Mary O'Sullivan and then there's John O'Sullivan and then there's

the other Mary O'Sullivan! Things can get complicated quickly. But the use of descriptive and locative nicknames come to the rescue:

"Did you hear about John Sullivan and his new horse?"

"Which John Sullivan is that? John down by the lake or John the shopkeeper?"

"Neither - John 'back the road!'"

After a while, different families of Sullivans became known by their nicknames. The Sullivan was mostly dropped in everyday conversation - and sometimes even dropped on official certificates. There were the Sullivan Cohus (providers), The Sullivan Glas (green), the Sullivan Labhras (hands), the



Sullivan Doyles (they took on a maternal surname), the Sullivan Breac (speckled) and many more nicknamed branches.

Over decades and centuries, many of these nicknames came into such common use that they became official surnames in their own right. As a result, if you come across the following surnames in West Cork and Kerry, they were most likely once O'Sullivan - but their nicknames evolved into these surnames over time:

Broughill, Bogue, Cohu, Downey, Downing, Dorohy, Doyle, Drummond, Green, Lowney, Lawson, McGrath and Taylor.

And, in theory - all of the O'Sullivans, including the nickname derivatives shown above - are descendants of just the one individual - old "Hawk-eye" himself!



How about you? Do you know the "nickname history" of the Irish surnames in your family tree?

Slán for now, Mike and Carina :)

9. The Warrior Surnames Of Ireland.

Céad Míle Fáilte - and welcome to your Letter from Ireland. Well now, the weather's really changed over the week here in County Cork. We have high winds, sharp air and a threat of local flooding. And just last Sunday we were swimming in the sea!

I do hope you are keeping well wherever you are today. I'm having a nice cup of Lyon's tea this morning - the tea my mother weaned us onto when we were toddlers! So, I hope you'll have a cup of whatever you fancy yourself and join me for today's letter.

A few weeks back, I received the following mail from Brenda Mills - one of our regular readers:

"I would love to know more about the McCoy's and where they came from. My grandmother would only say the McCoy's were from Ireland. When I was in Ireland, I was in Blarney Woolen Mills and there was an author selling his book. He told me that the McCoy's were from Ulster. I have not been able to prove that one way or the other. Any info would help."

Well, Brenda, I could tell you that the surname McCoy comes from the Irish "Mac Aodha" and leave it at that. However, there is a much



bigger story behind the McCoys in Ulster - and a number of similar distinct surnames found around Ireland. You see, the McCoys of Ulster were a "Gallowglass" family.

If you enjoy a little Shakespeare from time to time, you may have come across the following words in his play "Macbeth":

"The merciless Macdonald,

Worthy to be a rebel, for to that

The multiplying villainies of nature

Do swarm upon him, from the Western isles

Of kerns and gallowglasses is supplied"

The term "Gallowglass" mentioned comes from the Irish "Gallóglaigh" which literally translates as "young foreign warrior". This is a name that the Irish gave to those Norse-Scottish mercenaries who appeared on Irish shores for the first time in the 1200s. They came from the part of Scotland that was once the Kingdom of the Dal Riada - a kingdom that spread between the north of Ireland and the west of Scotland.

As Scots, they were Gaelic and shared a common culture and language with the Irish. But since they had intermarried with the Norse settlers in Scotland, the Irish called them Gall Gaeil ("foreign Gaels"). Many of the families in this area had become effective warriors, developing superior fighting methods and technology to that of the Irish.

The Arrival Of The Norse-Gaels In Ireland.

Over in Ireland the Irish Chieftains were facing a new and deadly threat. The Normans arrived in Ireland in the late 1100s, and after a difficult start, established a series of strongholds across the country into the 1200s.

The Irish chieftains faced a number of problems in fighting off this Norman threat to their Irish lands: First, the Normans easily beat the Irish forces in direct and open combat with their superior fighting methods and technology. Second, Irish society was made up of a series of alliances that could unravel at any time. An ally could suddenly join the Normans for a particular fight to gain the upper hand over a neighbour. The Gallowglass warriors of the western isles of Scotland provided a solution to both of these problems.

The first recorded of Gallowglass arrival in Ireland was in 1259, when the King of Connacht was provided with one hundred and sixty of these soldiers. They were provided with land and received supplies from the local lordships.

They carried a two-handed axe and a broadsword - and wore chainmail with an iron helmet - all of which were new to the native Irish. This equipment, as well as their fighting approach, made them more suitable for direct battle with the Normans (the native Irish typically made more use of their knowledge of local woods and bogs to ambush and skirmish). The local chiefs also felt comfortable with the loyalty of the Gallowglass as they were less affected by local feuds and promises.

So, how did some of the Gallowglass surnames become so prominent in Ireland? Well, some of these Gallowglass families were on the losing side of the Scottish wars of independence and this meant the complete loss of their lands. When they were offered alternative lands in Ireland in return for service, many decided to migrate as a full family group. The first of these clans were the MacSweeneys, who settled in Donegal. These were followed by MacDonnells/McDonalds in Antrim and the MacCabies in Cavan.

By 1512, there were about 60 Galloglass groups around the country under the Irish lords. They may have started out as Norse-Scots mercenary groups - but settled over time and intermarried with the native Irish. The term Gallowglass came to mean more a "fighting unit" that consisted of men of many different backgrounds. These Gallowglasses were an important part of the Irish fighting force right up to the Battle of Kinsale in 1601.

The Fighting Norse-Scots-Irish Surnames.

As I mentioned previously, whole Galloglass families left Scotland to settle in Ireland. So, although some of these surnames originated in Scotland, they are now considered Irish and include the following surnames:

McCabe, McCallion/McCallan, McColl/McColley, McCrory/McRory/Rogers, Gallogly/English, McGirr/Short, McGreal, Sheehy, McSorley and McSweeney/McSwiney.

When these surnames are found in Scotland today, it's often due to later Irish catholic emigration from Ireland to Scotland after the Irish famine.

However, a larger number of Galloglass families either went to Ireland on a seasonal basis - and later returned to Scotland - or only parts of clans moved fully to Ireland. As a result, there are a number of Gallowglass surnames that could be considered both Irish and Scottish - and are still found in both Ireland and Scotland today. These include:

McAllister/McAlister, McAteer/McIntyre, McAuley/ McAulay/ McCauley, Campbell, McClean/ McLean, McCoy/McKay, McCollum/ McCallum, McDowell /McDougall (some became Doyle), McDonnell /McDonald, McFadden/ McFayden and McNeill.

Remember that these Gallowglass surnames arrived in Ireland from Scotland before the reformation. However, from the 17th century on - some of

these surnames also arrived in Ulster as planted settlers - now typically Presbyterian.

So, Brenda - it seems like your friend in Blarney Woolen Mills was right - the McCoys in Ireland are typically from Ulster and most arrived in Ireland as warriors with fighting on their mind!

Slán for now - Mike :)

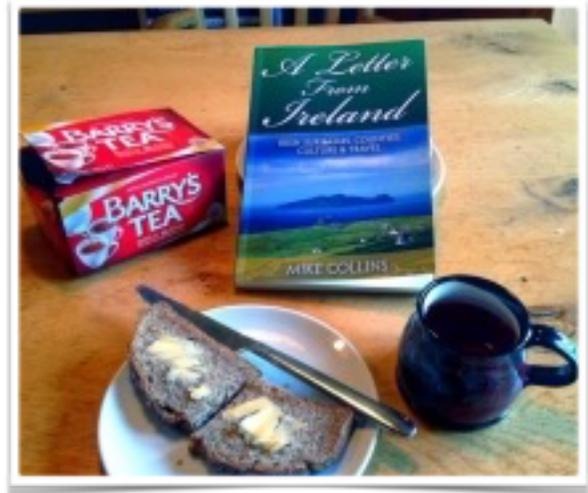
Before We Go...

Well, we hope you enjoyed that short tour around some solutions to the riddles behind the Irish surnames in your family tree.

Remember, To Connect With Us - And Bring Your Irish Ancestry To Life:

If you enjoy this book and it's contents, here are a few different ways that you can connect with us - and tell us a little more about the Irish surnames in your family tree.

Weekly Letter from Ireland: You may have received this booklet because you are already signed up for our **free weekly "Letter from Ireland"**, but if not, you can sign up for free here: <http://eepurl.com/xPw4P>



Our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/YourIrishHeritage/>

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Letter from Ireland Books: The Letter from Ireland books are available to purchase on Amazon here: <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00XJ0E8WO/>

Our Special Members Area, The Green Room - Find out more here: <https://youririshheritage.com/join-green-room/>

Whichever you decide, we will be delighted to make your acquaintance!

Slàn for now,

Mike and Carina Collins.