

About Heraldry and Surnames

The Mac, Mc and O'

Irish names are often preceded by Mc or Mac

(both meaning 'son of'), O (meaning 'of' or 'grandson of'),

Ni or Nic (both meaning 'daughter of'). Names of variant spellings generally have the same root clan and coat of arms as their origin.

For example: O'Mahoney, Mahoney, Mahanay, Mahonay, McMahoney, etc. all derive from the same root name Mahoney and where this name is most commonly found with a prefix (O or Mac, etc.) it is shown in the Gallery as such.

Example: Ahearne and Ahearn derive from the same root.

Example: Redmond, MacRedmond, O'Redmond, NiRedmond and McRedmond all derive from the same root.

Early Times

In ancient Ireland the population was much smaller than today and the mass movement of people was uncommon. It was usual, therefore, for a person to be known only by one name: Niall, Eoin, Art, etc. Once there was no one else in the locality with the same name then this was not a problem.

The Gaelic Clann System

The Gaelic Clann system was well established and this gave people a common identity with their people of the tribe and with the commonly shared area.

This single name system began to break down during the eleventh century as the population was growing and there was a need for a further means of identification.

The solution was to adopt a prefix such as Mac (Mc is an abbreviation) or Ó.

Mac means 'son of' whilst O' means 'grandson of'.

Mac surnames are generally of a much later date than Ó.

The vast majority of Gaelic Irish surnames were created during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

It should be noted that the Scottish Gaels were actually descendants of Gaelic emigrants to Scotland. The word 'Scotus' is Latin for 'Irishman'.

Scottish settlers who moved to Ireland (and especially Ulster) may already have been of Gaelic Irish descent.

Septs

The Clans eventually broke up into a number of distinct septs or groups.

These groups were headed by an original member of the clan and dominated a particular part of the countryside. It was not uncommon for septs from the same clan to be found in completely different parts of the country (O'Connor for example) so it is important when researching your roots to try to find out the original part of the country that your ancestors came from as this may be a completely different area from that where the 'major' sept was domicile.

The sept system was an integral part of Gaelic society and survived and was even propagated by the Norman invaders. The system did not survive the English invasion and colonisation of the seventeenth century however, and it became a disadvantage to have a Gaelic sounding name.

Anglicization

The Penal laws that were enforced by the colonists attempted to completely subjugate the Gaelic way of life. It is about this time then, that many Gaelic names changed to their Anglo equivalent or translation. This can cause confusion as many of the names were misinterpreted or misspelled. The name McEaney for example has a number of variants including McAneny and Bird (the Irish word for bird is éan). Mac an Thomáis was converted to Holmes, Mac Giolla Íosa to MacAleese, etc. The conversion of names beginning with Mac and Mc was even more difficult because the removal of the M sound from the name often completely changed the sound of the name.

The revival of Gaelic consciousness in the later eighteenth century saw many Irish families reassume the Mac, Mc, O' or other Irish form of their names although this was reduced in a number of cases depending on the sound of the name (Kelly is still much more prevalent than O'Kelly, Murphy more prevalent than O'Murphy, etc.)

Surnames today: There are many different origins for Irish names today but the vast majority can be broken down into either of three categories: Gaelic Irish, Cambro-Norman, and finally Anglo-Irish.

Neylon, O'Neylon, Neylan and O'Neill

The name Neilan in Ireland is derived from the native Gaelic Sept O'Niallain who were based in the Province of Connaught and in County Clare in particular. There are a number of variations of the name including Neylan, Nilan, Neyland and even Kneeland. The majority of descendants can still be found near the ancestral homeland.

Spelling variations include: O'Neilan, O'Neylan, Neilan, Neylan, O'Nelan, and others. First found in county Clare. They were anciently seated at Ballyally Castle. First landed in James O'Neylan arrived in Philadelphia in 1856.

The name O'Neill is derived from a number of distinct Septs that were widely dispersed throughout Ireland. Counties Clare, Waterford and Carlow were all strongholds but the most famous Septs were located in Counties Tyrone and Derry. It was this Sept that provided some of the High Kings of Ireland.

The Irish surname Neylon is an anglicisation of the Gaelic surname "O Niallain", which meant 'son of Neil/Nial'. "ain" in the Irish language means against. This surname originated in Thomond (county Clare) where the family were the original owners of Ballyally Castle.

In the Composition Book of Connacht, which was compiled in 1585, three people of this name are listed as persons of importance in county Clare. In 1659, the family was numerous in this area and was scarcely met with elsewhere. Even today, the family name is still chiefly found in the south of Galway, the areas of Connacht and Clare.

The Neylon's are descendants of the O'Neills. O'Neill is probably the oldest hereditary surname in Europe (it meant: Ua Neill or "grandson of Niall").

Myths and legends ~ one of the earliest O'Neill ancestors lived at the time of Moses, and this ancestor gave the name "Gael" to the Celtic peoples, who much later founded Ireland and were the backbone of Irish Monarchy for some 2000 years! Some of the O'Neill's ancestors were in fact, both Irish and Scottish Kings, monarchs, princes, lords and chiefs.

See History of the Neylon's to the Neylon's detailed origin.
Today the regular variances of the Neylon-surname are:

Neylon
Neilan
Nilan
Neiland

The names above have not been misspelled, there just happen to be a number of variances. The above is confirmed, partly from the Historical Research Center, different lexika, a number of sites in the internet and family information.

NEYLON SURNAME HISTORY
by Sonia Schorman

The name comes from the diminutive of the Christian name Niall, thus Nialláin. Originally a medical family and advisers to the powerful O'Briens. Their original seat was at Ballyalla and they then spread northwards into Connacht.

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Flannery

The name Flannery in Ireland is derived from the native Gaelic O'Flannabhra Septs that were located in Counties Limerick and Mayo. The name is taken from Gaelic words that translate as 'ruddy/red eyebrow' It is in these Counties that the majority of descendants can still today be found.

Maher

The Irish names Maher and Meagher are derived from the native Gaelic O'Meachair Sept that was located in Counties Tipperary and Offaly, and who were not removed from their homeland following the Anglo-Norman invasion. The name is taken from the Gaelic word 'michair' which means 'kindly'. This name is now widespread throughout Ireland.

Doherty

The names Doherty and Dougherty in Ireland are derived from the O'Dochartaigh Sept who were located in Inishowen in County Donegal in the North West of the country. Descendants of this Sept now rank among the twenty most frequently found names in Ireland.