

The McMahon Clan of Ireland

The McMahon Clan of Ireland is seeking to join together the descendants of the Irish McMahon's who have spread to every corner of every continent. Falling under the umbrella of the Irish Clans Network, this page offers a platform for all McMahon's to rediscover their Irish heritage.

Working in tandem with the policies of the Irish Government, and the objectives of the Global Irish Economic Forum - (www.globalirishforum.ie), the Irish Clans Network is an effort to connect the wide diaspora of Irish Clan names that are spread throughout the world.

The Irish Clans Network is a registrant of Irish Clans. It is an authoritative network involved in promoting the learning, understanding and impact that each Irish Clan has contributed to the world.

Just as the ancient Irish Clans drew strength from numbers and shared common goals, now we seek the creation of a better future by binding together those extended family members who are scattered across the globe.

To look forward we must first look back to discover who we are and to know from where we came. The surnames we have inherited from our ancestors are the greatest indicator of our origins and it is with this shared heritage that we can build opportunities for the next generation.

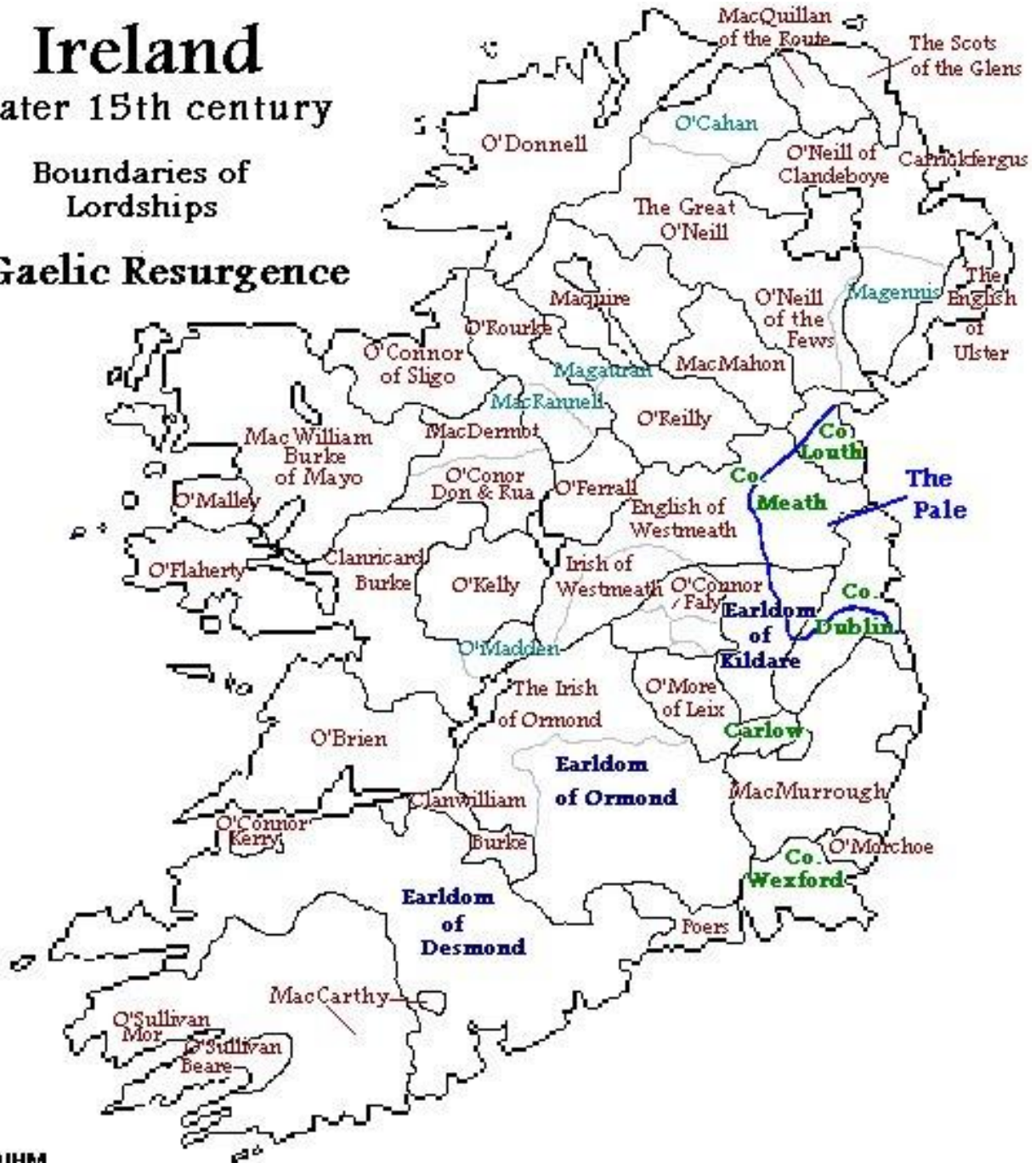


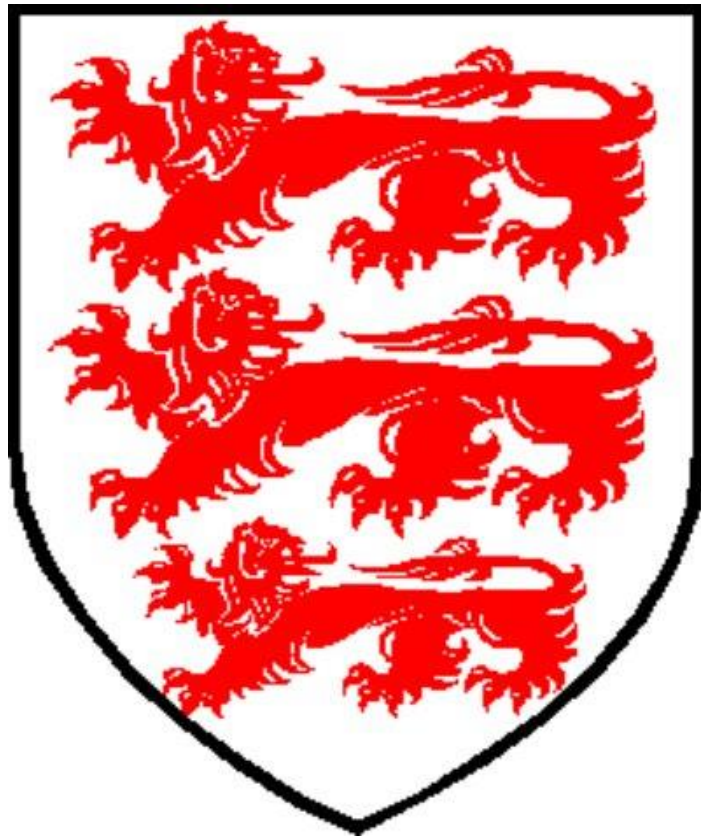
Ireland

later 15th century

Boundaries of Lordships

Gaelic Resurgence





The MacMahon Shield: 'Here is the fist of the dark-blooded'

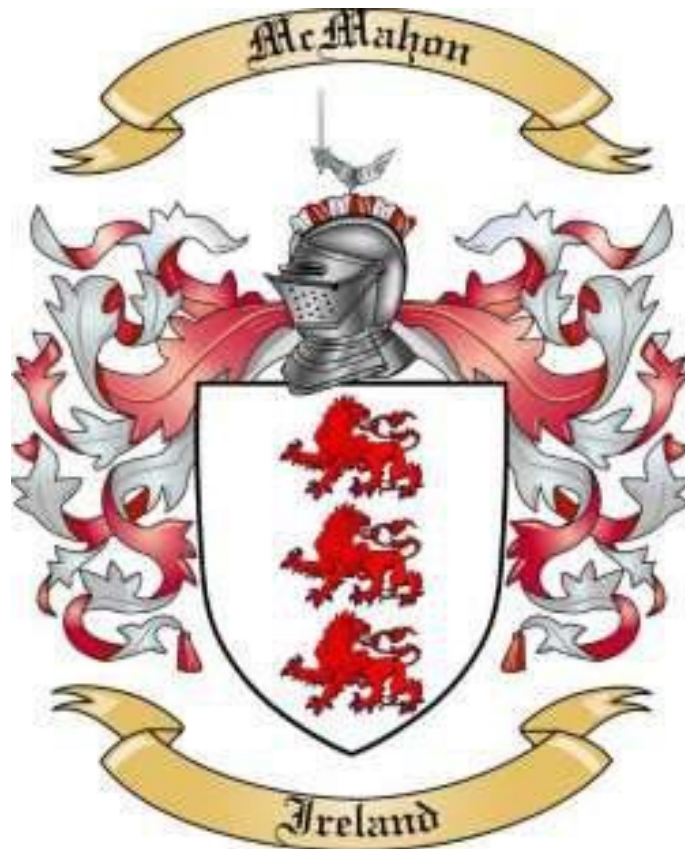


The McMahon's Burial Ground, Old Abbey Ruins, Clones.



***"Sic Nos Sic Sacra Tuemur" -- "Thus We Defend Our Sacred Rights."
The motto of the Thomond sept of the McMahons***

McMahon or MacMahon (old Irish: MacMathghamha modern Irish: MacMathúna) is an Irish surname. Two septs arose in Ireland with the surname McMahon, one in the Kingdom of Oriel in the province of Ulster, around modern County Monaghan; the second in Thomond, in the province of Munster, in modern County Clare. The sept in County Clare descends from Mathgamain mac Cennétig, brother of the High King of Ireland and founder of the O'Brien dynasty, Brian Boru. The McMahons rose to power in 1250 AD, in the Kingdom of Oriel, which roughly evolved into the present day County Monaghan. They were chieftains of the territory for nearly 400 years.



McMahon Coat of Arms / McMahon Family Crest

Our surname McMahon ranks among the 70 most common names in Ireland, and it is the most common name in County Clare, which was the homeland of one of the two septs called Mac Mathghamha, a branch of the ruling O'Briens established in western County Clare and known since the 12th century by the patronymic of their ancestor Mathghamha a son of Murcheartaigh Mor O'Brien, High King of Ireland. The other sept of the name belonged to Ulster and was located in Oriel, in County Monaghan, in which McMahon ranks as the third most common surname at the present time.

McMahon was derived from the Gaelic Mac Mathghamma, meaning 'bear'. The name of two septs, both of which are of great importance. One sept, Thomond, descends from Mahon O'Brien, grandson of Brian Boru. Ireland was one of the first countries to evolve a system of hereditary surnames. They came into being fairly generally in the 11th century, and indeed a few were formed before the year 1000.

The surnames in Ireland originally signified membership of a clan, but with the passage of time, the clan system became less distinct, and surnames came to identify membership of what is called a 'sept'; a group of people all living in the same locality, all bearing the same surname, but not necessarily descended from a common ancestor. Adoption of the name by people who did not otherwise have a surname and by dependents was not uncommon.

Just over 100 years after the Norman Conquest of England, the first Normans arrived in Ireland. Richard de Clare, Second Earl of Pembroke (died 1176), was known as 'Strongbow'. He was invited to Ireland by

Dermot MacMurrough, King of Leinster, whose daughter he married, to help him in his wars with his neighbours. He was accompanied by several retainers whose name, like his own, have become well established as surnames in Ireland. The Normans established themselves in Leinster and paid homage to Henry II of England.

Some of the Norman settlers acquired surnames derived from the Irish. At first the coat of arms was a practical matter which served a function on the battlefield and in tournaments. With his helmet covering his face, and armour encasing the knight from head to foot, the only means of identification for his followers was the insignia painted on his shield and embroidered on his surcoat, the flowing and draped garment worn over the armour.

This name comes from Mac Mathuna, which means son of a bear. It was first used by the son of Murtagh Mór, an O'Brien king of Ireland, who died in A.D. 1119. Traditionally, this sept was associated with County Clare: there's a 15th-century tomb of the McMahon family in Ennis Friary at Ennis, and at Loop Head the ruins of Carrigaholt Castle, a McMahon stronghold, can still be seen. The other sept of the MacMahons is connected with Co. Monaghan.



MacMahon stronghold- Carrigaholt Castle

Our Family Story

Our MacMahon family are descended from The Three Collas; brothers who were nephews to the High King of Ireland who attempted to take all of Ireland in 322 AD. They ended up ruling a portion of the island consisting of Counties Monaghan, Armagh, and parts of Fermanagh, Louth, and Tyrone. Their descendents were to rule this part of Ireland for some 1300 years, this Kingdom of Airghialla, later known as Oriel.

The MacMahon branch descended from Mathghamhain, who was slain in 1022. The first Mac Mahon to hold the title 'King of Airghialla', according to the Annals of the Four Masters, was Eochaidh Mac Mahon, who became King in 1250 and was killed in 1273. The MacMahons continued to rule Oriel for some 400 years.

The three Collas were the sons of Eocaidh Dublein, brother of Fiachaidh Sraibhtine, both sons of Carbri Lificar. The Collas mother was Oilech (aka Alechia), daughter of Ugari (aka Updar) the King of Alba (Scotland), and wife of Eocaidh. Their names were Carrell, Muredach, and Aedh.

The Collas were with King Fiachaidh, aiding him in battle, when word came of a victory by the King's son, Muredach Tirech, at a battle in Munster. The Collas decided at that point that their best chance to rule all of Ireland lay in killing the old King, before he named his son as heir to the throne. When the Collas made their intentions clear, one story suggests that the Fiachaidh consulted with his Druid, Dubhcomer, after whom the battle site was named. (Other sources cite the battle as named after the confluence of the Blackwater and Boyne Rivers)

The Druid cited the curse of the Fingal and told the King that if he were to slay his nephews, then the sovereignty of Ireland would be lost to his line forever. On the other hand, if he were to be slain by the Collas, the curse would prevent them from assuming the sovereignty and pass to his heirs. Thus, the forces of the Collas attacked the forces of the King and the King was slain in this battle.

Collas Uais then assumed the sovereignty of Ireland for four years, until the Collas were deposed by Muredach and took refuge at the court of their mother in Scotland. The King of Alba is said to have welcomed them and 'provided them military maintenance, by reason of their great valor and hardihood.' They remained for three years after which they returned to Ireland and approached Muredach, then High King of Ireland.

Apparently the Collas stayed with Muredach and became commanders of his army until such time that the king suggested they strike out and establish a territory of their own. The king suggested that they take Ulster from the infamous Ulaid in retribution for a long ago insult to an ancestor. The Collas marched into Ulster where they engaged with the armies of the Ulaid. The King of the Ulaid, Fergus Fogha was slain, Emhain-Macha sacked, and the Ulstermen routed.

The Irish Annals record for the year 331, "The battle of Achadh Leithdheirg, in Farney, was fought by the three Collas against the Ulstermen, in which fell Fergus, son of Fraechar Foirtiuin, the last king of Ulster, who resided at Eamhain. The (Collas) afterwards burned Eamhain (Macha), and the Ulstermen did not dwell therein since. Colla Meann fell in this battle.



MacMahon Tomb, Ennis, County Clare



Maire Rua MacMahon (1615 – 1686)

One noted McMahon was Maura Rua MacMahon, whose husband, Conor O'Brien, was killed by Cromwellian forces in 1651. They lived in Leamaneh Castle, near Kilfenora in County Clare. When enemy soldiers brought back her husband's body from the battlefield, she is said to have shouted at them from a window of the castle: "Take him away. We want no dead men here!"

Maire Rua was born in 1615, or possibly 1616. Her father was Torlach Rua MacMahon, Lord of Clonderlaw and her mother was Mary O'Brien, daughter of the third Earl of Thomond. Her place of birth is unclear. An elegy composed for her gives Bunratty as her birthplace but local tradition claims that she was born at Clonderlaw.

Her first husband was Daniel Neylon of Dysert O'Dea in north Clare. They had three sons, William, Daniel and Michael. It seems that a fourth son was born but died in infancy. When Daniel Neylon died, Maire Rua gained control of the estate.

Around 1639 Maire Rua married Conor O'Brien of Leamaneh. From State documents about Leamaneh, it seems he got a £1,000 fortune with her. In 1648, they built a more comfortable mansion on to the original 15th Century tower house at Leamaneh. Only the four walls with their mullioned windows are left in what must have been Clare's most magnificent seventeenth century house.

Conor and Maire had eight children, Donough (or Donat), Teige, Turlough, Murrough, Honora, Mary and two daughters who may have died of the plague that had raged in the Limerick district in the year of the siege.

Conor was killed in 1651 at the Pass of Inchicronan while leading his men against the Cromwellians. There are varied reports of Maire Rua's reaction to Conor's death. One report is that he was taken home in a very weak condition by his followers and that Maire Rua nursed him until he died at nightfall.

She would have realised that the punishment for Conor's rebellion was forfeiture of his property. It is reported that immediately after Conor's death she went, richly dressed, to Limerick. In a bid to retain her lands and estates she offered to marry immediately any Cromwellian officer who was willing. This is refuted in other versions of the story which state that Maire Rua didn't marry until 1653, two years after Conor's death.

In either case her third husband was Cornet John Cooper, a Cromwellian soldier. They had a son, Harry (or Henry), and possibly a daughter also. Through this marriage of expediency Maire Rua succeeded in keeping her estates intact for her children. John Cooper left the army and became wealthy through land and property speculation, though he later ran into financial difficulty, resulting in the mortgaging of Leamaneh.

In fact and in fable, Maire Rua was a formidable woman. Legends have grown up around her, many of them exaggerated with the passage of time and many of them simply untrue.

In 1664 she was granted a royal pardon on murder charges brought against her two years previously. These charges related to her supposed involvement with Conor O'Brien's raiding parties in the 1640's. Without doubt, she was a tough, forceful and determined woman, but there is no evidence to support the story of her throwing her third husband out of the window of Leamaneh, or of her forcing him to ride his horse over the Cliffs of Moher.

In fact, it seems that financially and legally the marriage of convenience lasted for many years, although they perhaps lived separate lives later on. She spent the final years of her life at Dromoland Castle. Her son, Donough, had moved the family seat from Leamaneh to Dromoland. He was brought up as a protestant and eventually became the "richest commoner in Ireland."

It is claimed by some that Maire Rua is buried at Coad church in Kilnaboy parish. Her two daughters are buried there and it is thought that Maire had constructed the church there following a dispute with the Rector at Kilnaboy.

Legends about Maire Rua may be exaggerated but documented history shows that she was indeed a remarkable and fearless character.

The most interesting group of tales is attached to Lemaneagh Castle, a fine, but bare, old mansion, with curious gardens, courtyards, fishpond, and outbuildings, between Inchiquin and Kilfenora. An inscription over a gateway kept the remembrance green of Conor O'Brien and his wife Mary MacMahon, but the gateway has recently been carried off and rebuilt in a modern garden at Dromoland.

The garden near the fishpond has a sort of summerhouse in one wall, with a niche on each side of the door, and tradition says that Maura Rhue (Mary O'Brien) built it for a famous blind stallion, so fierce that, when his grooms let him out, they had to spring up into the niches for safety.

Conor O'Brien built the gates to shut in the people of Burren, (for a road through the enclosures leads into that extraordinary mountain wilderness), and would let no one through who did not ask leave of

him and of his wife; but one of the Burren gentry gathered a band of the inhabitants, broke the gates, and forced O'Brien to promise free right of way forever.

'Maura,'-or, as she is known in East Clare, 'Maureen' Rhue (Little Mary), or, by some English-speakers, 'Moll Roo,'-used to hang her maids by their hair from the corbels on the old peel tower, (the nucleus of the building). Others said that she cut off the breasts of her maids. It was said she married 25 husbands, all the later ones for a year and a day, after which either of the pair could divorce the other. She used to put her servants into all the houses of her temporary husband, and then suddenly divorce him and exclude him from his property. She was a MacMahon and had red hair (whence her name), and she and Conor O'Brien used to ride at the head of their troops in the wars.

Her descendants at Dromoland and elsewhere told, in 1839 and later, a curious story of her and Conor. General Ireton was attacked by Conor O'Brien, who fell mortally wounded but would not surrender. His servants brought him back, nearly dead, to his wife at Lemaneagh. 'She neither spoke nor wept,' but shouted to them from the top of the tower,- 'What do I want with dead men here?' Hearing that he was still alive she nursed him tenderly till he died. Then she put on a magnificent dress, called her coach, and set off at once to Limerick, which was besieged by Ireton.

At the outposts she was stopped by a sentinel, and roared, and shouted, and cursed at him until Ireton and his officers, who were at dinner, heard the noise and came out. On their asking who was the woman, she replied,- 'I was Conor O'Brien's wife yesterday, and his widow today.' 'He fought us yesterday. How can you prove he is dead?' 'I'll marry any of your officers that asks me.' Captain Cooper, a brave man, at once took her at her word, and they were married, so that she saved the O'Brien property for her son, Sir Donat.

Lady Chatterton's account in 1839 tallies with that above. She says that Ireton sent five of his best men, disguised as sportsmen, to shoot Conor O'Brien, and one of them succeeded in wounding him. Mary captured and hanged the man, called her sons and advised them to surrender to the Parliament, and set off in her coach and six as described above.

At Lemaneagh it is added that one morning, after her marriage to Cooper, they quarrelled while he was shaving, and he spoke slightly of Conor O'Brien. The affectionate relict, unable to bear any slur on the one husband she had loved, jumped out of bed and gave Cooper a kick in the stomach from which he died.

It was told that Maureen Rhue was taken by her enemies, after killing the last of her 25 husbands, and was fastened up in a hollow tree, of which the site and alleged roots were still shown. Her red-haired ghost was reputed to haunt the long front avenue, near the 'Druids' altar.



The last chieftain of the Ulster MacMahons of Oriel, Hugh Oge MacMahon (1606 - 44), was a lieutenant-colonel in the Spanish army. He inherited a rich estate in County Monaghan and when he returned home in 1641 he became involved with Conor Maguire in the conspiracy to capture Dublin Castle. They were betrayed by Owen O Connolly, who had won their confidence. For several years they were imprisoned in the Tower of London. Making a brief escape, they were discovered hiding in Drury Lane and were charged with high treason and executed in 1644.



Chateau de Sully, near Orléans

In the 19th century, Edmonde Patrice MacMahon (1808- 1893) became President of France. The Chateau de Sully, near Orléans, is the home of the present Philippe MacMahon, the fourth Duke of Magenta and a direct descendant of the former President.



The Three Collas!

The Three Collas were the founders of the Kingdom of Airghialla. They were the sons of Eochy Dubhlen and Alechia, daughter of Updar, King of Alba (Scotland). Muireadach or Colla da Chrioch, meaning Colla of the Two Countries, Ireland and Alba, was one of three sons and the first King of Airghialla after their conquest of Ulster. This new kingdom consisted of the modern Counties Monaghan, Armagh, and parts of Fermanagh, Louth, and Tyrone. The three brothers all bore the name of Colla - Colla Uais, Colla Meann, and Colla da Chrioch. The designation Colla was "imposed on them for rebelling," and means strong man, their original names being Cairisall, Aodh and Muredach.

Colla da Chrioch became the first king of Airghialla (Oriel). The tribes of the three Collas were known as the Airghialla and included the Ui Cremthainn, Mughdorna, Ui Meath, Airthir, Ui Tuirte, Ui Meic Uais, and Gernmhaighe, among others. Noted chiefs of Airghialla included O'Carroll, O'Boylan, O'Heany or Hegney, O'Leighnin, O'Rogan. In the 13th century the family of MacMahon (MacMathghamhna) held the superior authority with the title King of Oriel.

The conquest of the Ulaid only began the story of Airghialla. Nearly all of the kings of Airghialla descend from Cremthann. Cremthann is the eponymous ancestor of the Ui Chremthainn, meaning only that the tribe was subsequently named after him.

By the year 697, with the defeat of the Airthir and inroads being made against the Airghialla on all sides, including increasing pressures from the Cenel Eogain and the Ui Neill, the Ui Chremthainn were the only branch of the Airghialla not significantly weakened by the advances of other tribes. This remained so until 827 when they were defeated by the Cenel Eogain in the battle of Leth Cam. In response to this defeat however, the Ui Chremthainn became more aggressive. For one, they assumed the title of Kings of Airghialla. Four subgroups emerged from the Ui Chremthainn. These included the Clann Lugain of Fermanagh, Clann Ceallaigh who controlled the area between Fermanagh and Clones in modern county Monaghan, the Sil Daimini who ruled a portion of Fermanagh, and the Ui Nadsluaig of Monaghan, from whom the O'Carrolls and MacMahons descend.

The Ui Nadsluaig ruled at Lough Ooney from around 700 AD but subsequently became prominent throughout the extent of modern day County Monaghan around 1000 AD. This was a time of great turmoil throughout all of Ireland as the concept of an Irish High King took on greater importance and various families struggled to assert their claims. To the north the Ui Neill were dominant. To the west Clann Lugain, also descendants of Chremthainn were dominant. This left any expansion by the Ui Nadsluaig to the east.

The eleventh century saw the breaking up of the kingdoms of the Ui Meath, Fir Rois, Conailli, and Mugdorna. Some families of the latter tribe moved east to south Down, giving their name to the Mountains of Mourne. As the Ui Nadsluaig moved east and southward into Monaghan, two other kingdoms remained in place. These were the Ua Baigeallain family of Dartraige and the Mac Murchadha family of the modern barony of Truagh.

Also as the Ui Nadsluaig moved eastward, some families moved and some remained behind. One of the families that moved eastward was the Ua Cerbaill (or O'Carroll). Of the families that remained behind, one was Mac Mathghamhna. The O'Carrolls became dominant in the east. These O'Carrolls were known as the Lords of Fernmaig and brought that name eastward with them, resulting in the modern day barony of Farney in south Monaghan, east of its point of origin. The O'Carrolls seem to have become more dominant in County Louth than in Monaghan. At about this same time, surnames were coming into existence. The eponymous head of the O'Carroll clan was Caireall, who lived about 950 AD.

The Connacht king from 1114 to 1156 was Turlough O'Connor and he is said to have been the strongest (or most powerful) man in Ireland. It was he who established Domhnall O'Carroll as king of Airghialla in 1125. Domhnall died that same year. Donnchadh succeeded him and became a figure of national import. Both were descendants of Mathghamhain or Mathgamna, Lord of Fearnmaig, who died in 1022 and who was the eponymous head of Clan MacMahon.

Donnchadh was loyal to Turlough O'Connor as O'Connor made an effort to become the high king of all Ireland. Donnchadh was also an ally of Muircheartach Mac Lochlainn, leader of the Ui Neill. When Mac Lochlainn succeeded in becoming high king and O'Connor did not, Donnchadh O'Carroll continued to be loyal to O'Connor while remaining an ally of the Ui Neill. This changed in 1166 when Mac Lochlainn captured and blinded Eochaidh Mac Duinn Slebe, king of Ulidia, Donnchadh O'Carroll's foster-brother. O'Carroll turned on Mac Lochlainn and, with the aid of Rory O'Connor, invaded Tyrone and defeated and killed Muircheartach Mac Lochlainn. This ended the rise of the Mac Lochlainn line and allowed the rise of the O'Neill Clan in its place.

Donnchadh O'Carroll died by accident in 1168 and was succeeded by his son Murchadh. This succession coincided with subtle but significant advances by the Normans. In 1178 John de Courcy (a Norman) marched toward Oriel but was routed by Murchadh and Rory, king of the Ulaid, at Gliury. Soon afterward they fought another battle "on the frontiers of Dalaradie, near Farnia" (Farney) where de Courcy barely escaped with his life. Murchadh seems to have had his hands full attempting to keep the Normans at bay but at the time of his death in 1189, he remained substantially the king of all Airghialla. Prior to his death he retired to the abbey of Mellifont, where he was buried near his father. He was succeeded by his son Muircheartach who remained king until 1194 when he was captured, blinded, and hanged by the Normans. This ended the O'Carroll reign over Airghialla and created the opportunity for the rise of the MacMahons.

Rise & Fall of the MacMahons

The Mac Mahons rose to power during tough times. The English invasion of Ireland had begun but the Irish were slow to see it in the national context, preoccupied as they were with their individual tuathas or kingdoms. The MacMahons replaced the O'Carrolls as the lords of Oriel after the latter were killed by the Normans and the remainder of the O'Carroll family apparently migrated out of Oriel. King Henry had granted lands in Oriel to his own Norman Lords but these men had no ability to take control of those lands as long as the O'Carrolls remained as Kings.

As late as 1189, the year of his death, Murchadh O'Carroll was in control of much of Airghialla, though the literature reads as though he had his hands full trying to keep the Kingdom together against the actions of the Normans. He was succeeded by Muircheartach O'Carroll. In 1194, Muircheartach was captured by the Normans and subsequently blinded and then hanged. With that act, the O'Carroll reign as Kings came to an end and other families vied for the position, with the princes of Fearnmhaigh, the 'Alder Plain' in what is now western Monaghan County, succeeding the O'Carrolls.

According to Livingstone, the invasion of the Normans left only three clans with any power at all. These were the Ui Baigeallain (O'Boylon) in Dartraige, the Mac Murchadha family in Truagh, and the MacMahons. The literature also suggests that the O'Hanlon family had considerable power and vied for control of Oriel, holding the title of King on a couple of occasions between the time of the O'Carrolls and the time when Eochaid established himself firmly as the first Mac Mahon King in 1250. The MacMahons arose from the Ui Nadsluaig family of the Airghialla tribes. Their ancestor was Mathghamhain, the 'bear-like' person, son of Laidcnen, King of Fearnmaig.

Mathghamhain was slain in 1022 by Cathalan ua Crichain, his cousin and the next reigning King of Fearnmaig. (Mathghamhna is a recurring name throughout early Irish history and is not restricted to this tribe or clan). The Mac Mahon reign began in about 1250 with the rise of Eochaid Mac Mahon of Lough Leck to the position of King of Oriel and lasted until Oriel came to an end with the beheading of the last Mac Mahon King during the Rising of 1641. But it was Niall Mac Mathghamhna that gave rise to the Mac Mahon kingship, a generation or two before Eochaid. The Mac Mahon reign was characterized by continuous turmoil due to constant threats by the Normans in Louth, the O'Neills of Tyrone, the Maguires in Fermanagh, and the O'Reillys of Cavan.

The family had humble origins at Lough Leck but were able to establish themselves in Monaghan town. At the start of Eochaid's reign Oriel was much diminished from its former size under the Collas or subsequent rulers. The Mac Mahons held reign in the western portion of modern County Monaghan and had a tentative hold on Monaghan town. But the Mac Mahons were to consolidate their powers, take advantage of circumstances and through aggressive action were successful in increasing the size of their territory over the coming years.

The family seemed to hold the philosophy that the best defense was offense. By 1300 the MacMahons gained control over much of the area of modern day County Monaghan. Eochaid was strong enough in 1264 to resist Aodh O'Neill's claim as King of Airghialla.

When Eochaid was slain by O'Hanlon and the Kinel-Owen in 1273, Livingstone suggests that Eochaid's son Roalbh succeeded him but it is not clear how long Roalbh lasted. In 1284 a Brian MacMahon

(another son of Eochaid) is mentioned as chieftain. Brian died in 1311 and his brother succeeded him but was killed in 1314.

Murchadh Mor Mac Mahon succeeded as the next chief of Oriel. (Oriel is an anglicized version of the word Airghialla) Murchadh Mor seemed to focus on conflicts in the western portion of the territory and neglected the east.

The MacMahon reign was characterized not only by fighting with neighboring lords but also by fighting among the Mac Mahons themselves. In 1331 Sean MacMahon of Farney was able, with the help of the Normans, to attack and slay Murchadh Mor Mac Mahon. Sean seized the chieftaincy of Oriel and held it for ten years. Sean was expelled in 1342 by Hugh Mac Mahon, who named himself as chief. Sean apparently returned the next year to lay claim once again but was killed in the conflict. Hugh died that same year and his successor was Murchadh Og Mac Mahon. Murchadh died after just one week and was succeeded by Manus Mac Mahon, grandson of Roalbh. The constant fighting and change in Kings held true in subsequent years.

One outcome of the continual fighting and expansionist practices was the gradual emergence of three centers of power of Mac Mahon chieftains within Oriel. One was in Monaghan town itself, another was Lisnagore, near Newbliss in Dartrey and the third was in Lurgans in Farney. Each area came to be governed by a local Mac Mahon chieftain and the importance of the title King of Oriel diminished in terms of the practical power or influence in each of these three distinct parts of the Kingdom. The MacMahons seem to have spent as much time fighting amongst themselves as they did fighting their external enemies (a quality still discernable in some MacMahons today).

Toward the close of the 15th Century, the family and the kingdom had split into three distinct groups:

The family of Eoghan MacMahon ruled Dartry from their fort at Lisnagore, near Clones. Livingstone describes these as the Dartry MacMahons.

The descendents of Reamonn MacMahon ruled the northern part of MacMahon's Countrie, also known as the Lucht Tighe, from Monaghan. Livingstone calls them the Monaghan MacMahons.

The descendents of Red Hugh MacMahon remained powerful in Farney, headquartered at Lurgans and then at Lisanisk, near Carrickmacross. These became known as the Farney MacMahons.

In political matters, the English and the O'Neills of Ulster sometimes treated these three divisions as three distinct kingdoms. Nonetheless, the MacMahons continued at least ceremonial appearances of a unified Oriel. They continued to appoint a single chieftain as "The MacMahon" at the Hill of Leck. The title became less coveted and less a point of strife as the divided MacMahons struggled against their neighbors and one another for their very survival.

The O'Neills imposed an overlordship on the lands of Oriel and tried to exact tribute from the MacMahons. The MacMahons struggled to free themselves from this burden, and when they failed they struggled just as mightily to make their small kingdoms prosperous. Often they took arms against one another in shifting alliances with or against different branches of the O'Neills.

Except for scuffles with the Maguires of Fermanagh, the Dartry MacMahons enjoyed the most peaceful reign in the 16th Century.

Out of political necessity, the Monaghan MacMahons tended to align with the fiercely Irish O'Neills who pressured them from the North.

Meanwhile, the Farney MacMahons tried to maintain a precarious peace in proximity to the Pale, an area of English dominion that reached as far north as County Louth. As the English grew more powerful, the days of raiding the Pale slipped into the storied past. During the rule of Ever MacMahon, the Farney MacMahons adopted some English customs, began speaking English, and, it is whispered, even aligned with the English against their MacMahon cousins to the West.

Hugh O'Neill became the O'Neill chieftain around 1593. He played a major role in organizing the smaller Irish chieftains and preparing for war with the English. The O'Neills controlled present day County Tyrone and the MacMahons presented a major problem for O'Neill in that the MacMahons were directly between O'Neill country and the path of the English. Hugh O'Neill attempted to build alliances with the MacMahons.

Ross Bui MacMahon of the Monaghan branch of the Clan succeeded his father to the title 'MacMahon' in 1579. Hugh O'Neill gave his daughter in marriage to Ross Bui to solidify the alliance. Even after this Ross Bui apparently continued to seek alliance with the English in an attempt to rid himself of O'Neill influence.

In 1585, Sir John Perrot, the natural son of King Henry VIII, visited the area and met with the Irish chieftains. The Irish themselves requested of him that Ulster be divided into shires and land apportioned to each of the MacMahon chiefs. A commission was established to accomplish this and County Monaghan came into being. The County was subdivided into the five baronies that exist today: Farney, Cremorne, Dartrey, Monaghan, and Truagh.

Afterward, Ross Bui made further attempts to build an alliance with the English and rid himself of O'Neill. Hugh O'Neill gave another daughter in marriage to Brian Mac Hugh Og of the Dartrey MacMahons. At stake was claim to the title 'Mac Mahon' after Ross. Under Irish law Brian Mac Hugh Og had claim to the title. In an attempt to establish his brother Red Hugh as the successor, Ross made further alliances with the English. This led to further troubles and by June of 1589, Ross Bui was dead as a result.

In 1591 the English again reapportioned the lands in Monaghan and again the MacMahons retained control of the majority of the land, but the English began slowly to give land to outsiders, bringing in strangers from the Pale as well as English Lords. This apportionment led to increased resentment and by 1593 the MacMahons and their cousins the Maguires took to the field in revolt.

Still the MacMahon infighting continued. Hugh Maguire, the sons of Ever Mac Con Uladh MacMahon and Brian Mac Hugh Og MacMahon entered Monaghan, then ravaged Farney, plundered Talbot's lands in Louth then returning to attack the English garrison in Monaghan town. Shortly afterwards though, Patrick Mac Art Moyle, Patrick Dubh and other MacMahons joined an English force attacking the home of Brian Mac Hugh Og, plundering Dartrey and burning Brian's house on the shores of Rooskey Lake and the crannogs on Rooskey and Drumca lake.

The Nine Years War began in earnest in 1594 and was the last major struggle to preserve Gaelic Ireland. The MacMahons continued to fight among themselves while Hugh O'Neill had not yet officially joined

the war and continued to build alliances in preparation. In 1595, O'Neill officially endorsed the inauguration of Brian Mac Hugh Og as 'MacMahon' and supported an invasion of Farney that restored Ever Mac Con Uladh to his ancestral home. By these acts, O'Neill gained the support of two of the important MacMahon leaders. Shortly afterward, Hugh O'Neill joined the war against the English. For a time it seemed that O'Neill did well against the English. When things did not go well, the Irish would craft a truce with the English, then regroup or harvest their crops, addressing their immediate needs, only to attack the English again when the timing suited them.

By 1597 things looked well for O'Neill. But the arguing among the MacMahons continued and O'Neill was not able to keep them together as allies. In 1598, the year of O'Neill's greatest victories, Patrick Mac Art Moyle claimed title of MacMahon in opposition to Brian Mac Hugh Og.

In 1600 Baron Mountjoy led the English efforts against O'Neill. His strategy was to surround O'Neill on all sides and by May 1601 Mountjoy could claim that Farney, the Fews in Armagh, Clancarrol, the O'Hanlons, as well as many of the MacMahons and O'Reillys were 'reduced'. The MacMahons who surrendered to Mountjoy included Ever Mac Con Uladh, Patrick Mac Art Moyle, Art Mac Rory Mac Brian, and Brian, the brother of Red Hugh. Meanwhile, Brian Mac Hugh Og was still at large and continued to fight.

In September 1601 the Irish, including Hugh O'Neill and Brian Mac Hugh Og suffered a major defeat at Kinsale. O'Neill and Brian Mac Hugh Og held out for almost two more years, attempting to negotiate a favorable surrender. But Mountjoy had invaded and retaken Monaghan and would not come to terms. In March, 1603 Brian Mac Hugh Og, the last of the MacMahons to do so, surrendered. Later that year O'Neill surrendered, bringing an end to the Nine Years War. England had now completed their conquest of Ulster.

By this time, the war had had its effects and Monaghan had become a bleak place. The English attorney general, John Davies described the area as 'the wastest and wildest part of all the north'. Davies further described the MacMahons as the 'proudest and most barbarous sect among the Irish'. And, as told by Peadar Livingstone, what was lost at Kinsale 'was a whole way of life'.

The effect of the loss was not immediate. The MacMahons retained control of much of their lands. But they were not able to adapt to the ways of English law and culture. Taxes were imposed and there was no way to pay them. The Irish failed to understand why they should pay taxes on lands that had always been theirs.

The Rising of 1641 was to result in the greatest defeat the Irish had yet experienced. The Irish rose against the English but when the wars were over, the remaining Gaelic nobles were mostly dead. Prior to the Rising, the MacMahons are listed in the tax records as owning some 78 townlands. After the wars, the MacMahons are no longer listed as landowners in County Monaghan.

And so it came to be that the once great Kingdom of Oriel that had lasted for some 1300 years came to an end. Its rulers were dead. Starvation, poverty, and pestilence followed in its wake. Subsequent years brought greater difficulties and with those Clan MacMahon scattered, many seeking new lives elsewhere.

Information compiled from the McMahon Homepage on Facebook by Michael Thomas, March 2014