

**ARE YOU LOOKING FOR THE CORRECT SURNAME? by Nora M. Hickey, FGS
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1 Irish Surnames were few before 1000 AD, and developed mainly in the eleventh century, as the population increased, making the former practice of single names followed by patronymics or agnomina of the nickname type.

2 Originally prefixed Mac to the father's name, and O to the grandfather or earlier ancestor, later other surnames were adopted, such as occupations or characteristics.

Mac an Bháird	son of the bard	MacWard, Ward
Ó hÍceadha	doctor or healer	Hickey
Mac Dubhghaill	black stranger	MacDowell
O Mahony Canniv	black-haired Cian	Canniffe

3 Adding an epithet denoting a personal characteristic led to the loss of the surname

Mahony/Donovan&c	fair-haired = bán	Bane, White
Donovan	red-head = ruadh	Roe
MacCarthy	láidir = strong	Lawder

4 Translation from Gaelic to English/Abbreviation/Distortion

Smith, Co. Cavan	son of the smith	Mac an Ghabhann
Monday	MacAloon	Mac Giolla Eoin
MacLice	MacAleese	Mac Giolla Íosa
Abraham/Beheny/Judge	son of the judge	Mac ab Bhreitheamhain
MacEl.../MacIl.../MacG		Magee, Magennis

Interesting Surname Points of Note:

- [a] Ignore the fallacy that Mc is Irish and Mac is Scottish. Read the Introduction in Edward MacLysaght: *The Surnames of Ireland*.
- [b] Note that most nineteenth century records do not have the O or the Mac: these prefixes were lost as the surname was translated from the Gaelic: added from the revival of Nationalism in the 1880s, eg Sullivan/ O Sullivan registered births [MacLysaght]:
- [c] This resumption of the O did not happen with several surnames - Murphy, Connolly, Foley &c.
- [d] Likewise the Mac was not always resumed - Brady, Clancy, Egan, Keogh
- [e] Sometimes the wrong prefix was used, O Gorman/MacGorman; O Costelloe/MacCostello
- [f] Some surnames may be misread or confused, due to poor handwriting / pronunciation:

Regan/Ryan	Buckley/Brickley	Sullivan/Gallivan [=Galvin]
Herlihy/Early	Hurley/Murley	Cummins[Cuman] Coholohan/Coughlan

Initial Letters.

Cases of substitution of one letter for another are very common, thus:

A and E	.	.	Allison	.	.	Ellison
C and G	.	.	Cannon	.	.	Gannon
C and K	.	.	Carr	.	.	Kerr
C and Q	.	.	Cuddihy	.	.	Quiddihy
F and Ph	.	.	Fair	.	.	Phair
F and V	.	.	Farrelly	.	.	Varrelly
G and J	.	.	Gervis	.	.	Jervis
G and K	.	.	Gilfoyle	.	.	Kilfoyle
P and W	.	.	Phelan	.	.	Whelan
Q and T	.	.	Quigg	.	.	Twigg
Q and W	.	.	Quinton	.	.	Winton

[Matheson]

[g] Be aware of the variations due mainly to phonetics: ÓhAnnacháin, Hanahen, Hannon; Fagan/Hagan/ Fogarty/Hogarty; O Hara/O Gara

[h] Church registers tend to reflect the local customs, omitting the main surname
O Driscoll: Cadogan/Cronicane/Kerucane Crowley: Bui/Bwee
Sullivan; Bouig/Mountain/Twohig Hurley: Carriga/Randles

The Registrar of Sneem District, in Kenmare Union, reports – “‘Dorohy’ is applied to Sullivan, such as Sullivan Dorohy, also ‘Mountain,’ as Sullivan Mountain and the other Sullivans are called after the locality they live in, &c., as ‘Sullivan Glanac,’ ‘Sullivan Brachae,’ ‘Sullivan Dillough,’ ‘Sullivan Budoch.’” [Matheson]

[i] Confusion of surnames, such as different surnames being pronounced and spelt as if they were the same, and had the same origin. In Co. Cork, Coholane and Coughlan are an example of this ‘mixing,’ mainly due to local pronunciation. Matheson quotes the example below:

Some years ago the marriages of a brother and of a sister in the same family were solemnized in a Registrar’s office. The son gave his surname as “Faulkner,” and his father’s surname as “Faulkner.” The daughter gave her surname as “Falconer,” and her father’s surname as “Falconer.” Both marriages were subsequently re-solemnized in a place of worship, and the same orthographical differences were found to exist in the records kept by the officiating minister.

[j] It may be possible to identify the location in Ireland by the pronunciation and form of the spelling used in the country of immigration, eg the consonants are usually spoken softer in the south of the country. The O’Driscolls of Co. Cork are often written in other forms, see [h] above, but one version - Wholley - is said as ‘Whelly’ in parts of West Cork. Matheson shows another example from the north countries:

The name MacAlshinder [synonyme for Alexander], which is the form

used in the Larne District, is found in the following forms in other districts: –

Elchinder,	in	Ballymoney District.
Elshander,	“	Ballylesson “ [Lisburn Union].
Elshinder,	“	Lisburn Union.
Kalshander,	“	Dromore District [Banbridge Union].
M’Calshender,	“	Ballymena Union.
M’Calshinder,	“	Banbridge “ .
M’Elshender,	“	Doagh [Antrim Union].
M’Elshunder,	“	Ballymoney Union.
M’Kelshenter,	“	Tanderagee District [Banbridge Union].