

INTRODUCTION TO IRISH AND SCOTTISH NAMING

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I. TO GAELIC, OR NOT TO GAELIC

- There are many myths about what is or is not a Gaelic name, most of which are perpetuated by the average internet website on “Celtic” names.
- Gaelic was the majority language only in Ireland; in Scotland it was spoken only by a minority.
- Gaelic was not the only language spoken in Ireland. After the first Norman invasion in the late 12th century, you also find Anglo-Norman names entering the naming pool. Also, when the Norman and later English invaders starting trying to write down Gaelic, you got a distinct language called “Anglicized Irish.”
- In Scotland, very few people spoke Gaelic and we have very few written records in Gaelic. A Scottish person is more likely to speak Scots and/or English than Gaelic. Some Scots also spoke forms of Norse. So you don’t “have to put your name in Gaelic” if you want a Scottish persona.
- So, what does this mean for someone who wants an Irish or Scottish persona?
 - If you’re Irish, are you native or from an Anglo-Norman family that has been living there since the invasion?
 - Hint: Irish names like *Fitzgerald* or *Butler* aren’t Gaelic. Those are Anglo-Norman family names borne by invaders who settled and stayed.
 - If you want a name that starts with O’ like *O’Toole*, you can only be Irish. That construction did not exist in Scotland.
 - Even if you are native Irish, there’s a good chance that your name was recorded (effectively phonetically) in Anglicized Irish after about the 14th century.
 - Anglicized Irish forms are vastly easier for modern English speakers to pronounced:
Cormack mac Teige MacCarthy = Anglicized Irish
Cormac mac Taidhg mhic Cárthaigh = Gaelic

- If your persona is Scottish, it's far more likely your name will be in Scots than in Gaelic.
- If you're a woman, and you want to use a byname that starts with *Mac-* or *O'* then you **must** construct your name in Anglicized Irish or Scots.
 - In Scotland, Mac- surnames became inherited surnames as highland families settled in cities and lowland parts of the country. Alys Mackyntoich isn't the son (or daughter) of a chieftain; she's the daughter of someone named Mackyntoich.
 - Because the English people writing down Irish names didn't understand the difference between men's names and women's names in Gaelic, we find Anglicized Irish names for women using Mac and O constructions.
- "But I found it on the Internet!"

These words make heralds cry. Here's a few hints to help make sense of what a submitter brought you:

- If it's the spelling someone's grandparent used, it's almost definitely Anglicized Irish, not Gaelic.
- Names of Irish saints are generally OK if we can confirm that they were venerated in period. Names of legendary figures like *Cu Chulainn* are not, unless there is evidence that real people adopted those names.
- Baby naming websites, "clan history" websites and Behind the Name generally are not reliable.
- Amateur-prepared genealogies are not necessarily reliable. But, they may provide evidence that will help an experienced herald find a reliable source.
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II. CONCEPTS IN GAELIC GRAMMAR

Gaelic grammar has a number of unfamiliar concepts that affect naming and name structure. When building a Gaelic name, you should always have “Quick and Easy Gaelic Names” by Effric neyn Kenyeoch vc Ralte (<http://www.medievalscotland.org/scotnames/quickgaelicbyname/>) open and handy at all times.

Genitive Forms: “Mac” does not actually mean “son of” – it merely means “son.” To make a byname that means “son of [father’s name],” the father’s name must be in the possessive or genitive case.

Lenition: When forming certain kinds of bynames, usually for women, the second element of the name must be lenited. Ms. Krossa explains that, “[g]rammatical *lenition* involves a “softening” of the initial consonant sounds of words in certain grammatical situations. This pronunciation change in Gaelic is sometimes indicated by a changed spelling as well.”

Usually, *lenition* requires adding an “h” after the initial consonant. For more guidance on how to lenite a name, refer to Effric’s “Quick and Easy Gaelic Names” and also to “The Spelling of Lenited Consonants in Gaelic” by Effric neyn Kenyeoch vc Ralte (<http://medievalscotland.org/scotland/lenition.shtml>)

Pre-1200 vs. Post-1200 Spellings: Gaelic spelling conventions changed substantially around approximately 1200 C.E. For SCA purposes, Gaelic prior to 1200 C.E. and Gaelic after 1200 C.E. are considered two different languages.

When creating a Gaelic name, you should try to make sure that all elements of the name are in the same form of Gaelic. If there is any doubt as to whether the spelling is pre-1200 or post-1200, be sure to advise the submitter to consent to ALL changes. Because pre-1200 and post-1200 Gaelic are different languages under the SCA rules, changing *inghean* to *ingen* is considered a MAJOR change.

Gender Matters: The gender of the given name matters when constructing a Gaelic name. In Gaelic, women cannot use the marker *mac*, which literally means “son.” Nor can they use the marker *Ó* in a surname. Instead, they must use *ingen/inghean*, meaning “daughter” in place of *mac* and *ingen Ui/inghean Ui* in place of *Ó*. In addition, lenition is almost always required when using a descriptive byname for a woman, while it is not for men.

III. Gaelic Naming in Ireland

A. Name Patterns

Irish Gaelic names use the following patterns:

- **Simple patronymic bynames:** Appropriate throughout the SCA's period.
 - For men: <given name> **mac** <father's name in the genitive case>
 - For women before 1200: <given name> **ingen** <father's name in the genitive case and usually lenited>
 - For women after 1200: <given name> **inghean** <father's name in the genitive case and usually lenited>
- **Clan affiliation bynames:** Appropriate from approximately the 10th cen. onwards.
 - For men before 1200: <given name> **Ua** <clan ancestor's name in genitive case>
 - For men after 1200: <given name> **Ó** <clan ancestor's name in genitive case>
 - For women before 1200: <given name> **ingen Uí** <clan ancestor's name in genitive case & always lenited unless starting with a vowel>
 - For women after 1200: <given name> **inghean Uí** <clan ancestor's name in genitive case & always lenited unless starting with a vowel>
- **Descriptive adjective bynames** in the form <given name> + <adjective byname>
 - When modifying a woman's name, the descriptive adjective byname needs to be lenited, except for a few very specific exceptions. For example, the descriptive byname *Dubh* becomes *Dhubh* when added to a woman's name:

Gráinne Dhubh = Black Grace

The exceptions for the rule requiring lenition of women's descriptive bynames can be found in Krossa's "Quick and Easy Gaelic Names" (<http://medievalscotland.org/scotnames/quickgaelicbyname/#exceptions2>)

- A descriptive byname can be added to any of the patronymic styles. Placed after the given name, it modifies the given name. Placed after the father's name, it modifies the father's name. For example:

Aindriú Ruadh mac Tomais = "Red Andrew, son of Thomas"

Gráinne Dhubh inghean Domhnaill = "Black Grace, daughter of Donnell"

Conn mac Muireadhaigh Móir = "Conn, son of Big Murdoch"

Fionnghuala inghean Ádhaimh Óig = "Finola, daughter of Young Adam"

- **Multi-generational bynames**
 - For men before 1200: <single given name> **mac** <father's given name in genitive case> **meic** <grandfather's given name in genitive case & always lenited unless starting with C or a vowel>
 - For men after 1200: <single given name> **mac** <father's given name in genitive case> **mhic** <grandfather's given name in genitive case & always lenited unless starting with C or a vowel>
 - For women before 1200:<single given name> **ingen** <father's given name in genitive case & always lenited unless starting with D, T, L, N, R, or a vowel> **meic** <grandfather's given name in genitive case & always lenited unless starting with C or a vowel>
 - For women after 1200:<single given name> **inghean** <father's given name in genitive case & always lenited unless starting with D, T, L, N, R, or a vowel> **mhic** <grandfather's given name in genitive case & always lenited unless starting with C or a vowel>

- **Patronymic plus Clan:** Appropriate from approximately the 10th cen. onwards.
 - For men before 1200: <single given name> **mac** <father's given name in genitive case> **Ua** <clan ancestor's name (in genitive case & always lenited unless starting with a vowel)>
 - For men after 1200: <single given name> **mac** <father's given name in genitive case> **Uí** <clan ancestor's name (in genitive case & always lenited unless starting with a vowel)>
 - For women before 1200: <single given name> **ingen** <father's given name (in genitive case & always lenited unless starting with D, T, L, N, R, or a vowel)> **Ua** <clan ancestor's name (in genitive case & always lenited unless starting with a vowel)>
 - For women after 1200: <single given name> **inghean** <father's given name (in genitive case & always lenited unless starting with D, T, L, N, R, or a vowel)> **Uí** <clan ancestor's name (in genitive case & always lenited unless starting with a vowel)>

Name Patterns Not To Use

There is **no** evidence in Irish Gaelic for:

- Double given names
- Metronymics (bynames formed based on the mother's name)
- *Ní* and *nic* prior to 1600.

B. Irish Gaelic Naming Resources

1. Reliable Sources

“Historical Name Generator: Sixteenth Century Irish and Scottish Gaelic Names,” by Effric neyn Kenyeoch vc Ralte (<http://www.medievalscotland.org/scotnames/hng16gaelic/>)

“Index of Names in Irish Annals,” by Mari neyn Bryan (<http://www.medievalscotland.org/kmo/AnnalsIndex/>)

“Dated Names Found in Ó Corráin & Maguire's *Irish Names*” by Mari Elspeth nic Bryan (<http://www.medievalscotland.org/kmo/ocm/>)

“16th & 17th Century Anglicized Irish Surnames from Woulfe,” by Mari Elspeth nic Bryan (<http://medievalscotland.org/kmo/Woulfe/>)

The CELT Archive (<https://www.ucc.ie/celt/>)

2. Use with Care

Woulfe, Patrick, *Sloinnte Gaedheal is Gall: Irish Names and Surnames*. Dublin: M. H. Gill & Son, Ltd, 1923. Note that this book is acceptable documentation *only* for bynames and clan names. The given names section has been ruled unreliable. Additionally, only the headings that have italicized forms under them can be used. The italicized headers are 16th and early 17th century Anglicized Irish forms. It is far better to use Mari's article on Woulfe (see above), which extracts only the reliable and usable data.

Ó Corrain, Donnchadh & Maguire, Fidelma. *Irish Names*. 2nd ed. Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1990. [Another edition has the title Gaelic Names.] When using this source, keep in mind that only the form before the colon is period; the forms after the colon are post-period spellings. This book also contains a number of names of purely legendary figures or semi-mythic relatives of saints; neither of these sorts of names are registerable.

3. Name Sources to Avoid

There's a lot of bad Gaelic on the Internet. Most of it is modern (or at least post-period) Gaelic. In addition, the Victorians had a “Celtic Revival” which contributed a lot of false information about Gaelic names and naming. Be careful that any source you rely on has dates clearly given for names cited. Anything cited only as “traditional” is almost always post-period.

- Edward MacLysaght, *The Surnames of Ireland* is no longer acceptable as the sole support for a Gaelic name. According to Appendix F of the Administrative Handbook: “The focus of this book is on modern usage; in particular the spellings, both of English and Gaelic forms are modern.”

IV. GAELIC NAMING IN SCOTLAND

A. Name Patterns in Scottish Gaelic

There is far less information about Scottish Gaelic names than there is about Irish Gaelic names. The SCA allows Scottish Gaelic forms and Irish Gaelic forms to be intermingled because there were many close parallels between the languages. Likewise, the same naming patterns generally are acceptable for both Scottish and Irish Gaelic names.

- By far the dominant name form in Scottish Gaelic is <given name> + <patronymic byname>. The construction of Scottish Gaelic patronymic bynames follows the same patterns as in Irish Gaelic: <Domnall mac Ruadrí> or <Muirgheal inghean Alasdair>
- Scots Gaels also used two-generation patronymics showing not only father, but also grandfather. For example, <Domnall mac Alasdair mec Briain>
- Scottish Gaels also used descriptive adjective bynames, like beag (small), reamhar (stout), mór (big), ruadh (red), bán (fair), and dubh (black). They were used as stand-alone bynames or in conjunction with a patronymic.
- There is no evidence of mother's given names being used to form bynames.
- There is no evidence of double given names in any form of Gaelic.

B. Name Resources for Scottish Gaelic

“A Simple Guide to Constructing 12th Century Scottish Gaelic Names,” by Effric neyn Kenyeoch vc Ralte (<http://heraldry.sca.org/laurel/names/simplescotgaelicnames12.htm>)

“Historical Name Generator: Sixteenth Century Irish and Scottish Gaelic Names,” by Effric neyn Kenyeoch vc Ralte (<http://www.medievalscotland.org/scotnames/hng16gaelic/>)

“Scottish Gaelic Given Names (Draft in Progress Edition),” by Effric neyn Kenyeoch vc Ralte (<http://www.medievalscotland.org/scotnames/gaelicgiven/>). The article itself gives certain cautions about its use: “The beginnings of an article on given names used by Scottish Gaels before 1600. At the moment it offers mainly just lists of evidence, with little or no interpretation. It should be used with great care and only after reading the cautions and disclaimers at the start of the articles and the introductions. Note that the information in this article will be changing as more is added and corrected.”

Because of the dearth of specifically Scottish Gaelic sources, we assume the same Gaelic names were used in Ireland and Scotland at the same times – at least until we find more and better Scottish sources.

C. Sources NOT to Use:

Peader Morgan, *Ainmean Chloinne: Scottish Gaelic Names for Children* – According to Appendix F to the Administrative Handbook “Dates within the book are presumed to be accurate, though the forms may not be accurate for the date cited. Items without dates are presumed to be post-1650”

IV. GOING BEYOND GAELIC

A. Name Patterns in Anglicized Irish

Because Anglicized Irish names frequently represent English attempts at rendering Gaelic, the patterns generally follow the patterns of Gaelic names. “Names Found in Anglicized Irish Documents” by Kathleen O’Brien (<http://medievalscotland.org/kmo/AnglicizedIrish/>) shows examples of:

- Simple patronymic bynames, such as:
 - Towall M'Donill
 - Arte M'James
 - Moire nyn Dermott (f)
 - Any ny Bryene (f)
- Clan affiliation bynames, used by both men and women, such as:
 - Tirlogh O'Neale
 - Breene O Duffey
- Descriptive byname, such as:
 - Cormack reagh
- Multi-generational bynames, such as:
 - Cormack m'Teige M'Carthie
 - John m'Owen M'Cragh
 - Any nyn Teige ny Mahown (f)
 - Ellen ny Bryene m'Donnell M'Swyny (f)
- Combinations of the above, such as:
 - Alexander m'Tirlaghe O'Donell
 - Bolagh duffe m'Caribre M'Eagain
 - Brian M^c Hebbard O'Ferrall of Killacomoge
 - Annable nyn Irriell O Farrall (f)
 - Dorren nyne Donogh m'Dermody O Birne (f)
 - Ellen oge nick Brien (f)

English families living in Ireland continued to use Anglo-Norman naming patterns, including inherited surnames. For example, “Names Found in Anglicized Irish Documents” contains the following examples:

Rowland Bourke

Alice Barry

Patronymic bynames of Anglo-Norman origin often use *fitz* rather than *mac*:

William FitzGerald alias Barron

Archebold fitz John

For women, English families in Ireland also used patronymics based on the father's full name (given name + inherited surname), such as:

Joan fitz Edm. Barret

Katherine fitz Wm. Butler

English women also sometimes used inherited surnames plus a patronymic, such as:

Onorye Cavanaghe fitz Morchoe

Mary Lacie fitz John

NOTE: *M'* and *Mc* are scribal abbreviations for *Mac*. SCA practice is to expand both of these abbreviations to *Mac* for registration.

B. Anglicized Irish Naming Resources

"Fourteenth to Sixteenth Century Irish Names and Naming Practices," by Tangwystyl verch Morgant Glasvryn (<http://www.s-gabriel.org/names/tangwystyl/lateirish/>)

"16th & 17th Century Anglicized Irish Surnames from Woulfe," by Mari Elspeth nic Bryan (<http://medievalscotland.org/kmo/Woulfe/>)

"Names Found in Anglicized Irish Documents," by Mari ingen Briain meic Donnchada (<http://medievalscotland.org/kmo/AnglicizedIrish/>)

Woulfe, Patrick, *Sloinne Gaedheal is Gall: Irish Names and Surnames*. Dublin: M. H. Gill & Son, Ltd, 1923. The italicized forms under the surname headers are late 16th or early 17th century Anglicized Irish forms.

C. Creating and Documenting Scots Names

1. Name Forms

Scots names follow the general form <given name> + <byname>. They are constructed along the same lines as English names.

- Possible types of bynames found in Scots are:
 - Patronymic bynames based on the father's given name;
 - Bynames based on a Scots rendering of a Gaelic Mac- style patronymic;
 - Inherited surnames;
 - Bynames based on locations;
 - Bynames based on occupations; or
 - Bynames using more than one of the above.

2. Patronymics

Scots patronymic bynames were often unmarked. In other words, they were not indicated by mac- or another marker. Instead, the father's name standing alone, unmodified, forms the byname.

Scots patronymic bynames could also be formed by adding –son or –sone or -soun to the father's name. For example, Sharon Krossa's "Early 16th Century Scottish Lowland Names" (<http://medievalscotland.org/scotnames/lowland16/surnamesalpha.shtml>) contains examples of:

Adamsone, Adamsoun

Alexandersone

Anderson, Andersone, Andersoun

By the 16th century (and possibly earlier), these types of patronymics were not literal. They had become inherited surnames. Thus, a woman could bear the surname *Andersoun*.

3. Scots Renderings of Mac- Style Patronymics

Gaelic names were often rendered into Scots when written down in public records in period. For example, a Scots-language parliamentary record of 7 January 1645 contains the name *Donnald Glas McRonnald of Keppoche*. *Donnald Glas McRonnald* is the Scots rendering of a Gaelic *Domhnall Glas mac Raghnaill*.

NOTE: *M'* and *Mc* are scribal abbreviations for *Mac* or *Mak*. Both abbreviations are expanded to *Mac* or *Mak* for registration. There is never a space between *Mac* or *Mak* and the father's name in period Scots. Thus, *MacFaden*, not *Mac Faden*.

In Scots, *Mac* and *Mak* are used effectively interchangeably.

4. Multi-element Scots Bynames

Just as in English names, the pattern <given name> + <surname> + <locative> is commonly found in Scots names. For example, in a Scots-language parliamentary record of 26 November 1513, one finds:

Williame Murray of Tulibardin
William Menteith of Kerse
Patrick Crechtoune of Cranstone
Patrik Hammiltone of Glencavill, knychtis
David Bruse of Clakmannan
Andro Ker of Farnyhirst
James Schaw of Sauchy, knycht
Alexander Hume of Spott

This style of multi-element byname is appropriate even when the surname is a marked byname. For example, a Scottish parliamentary record (written in Latin) dated 24 April 1531 contains:

Johanne Makclane de Lochboy
Johanne McCloyd' de Lewis
Morphe McPhe de Colwisnay
Ewino Makkymmyng de Stracardill
Hectore McClane de Doward'
Alexandro McCloyd de Dunwagane

D. Resources for Scots and Scoto-Norman Names:

Collections of names:

Black, George F. *The Surnames of Scotland: Their Origin, Meaning, and History*. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1993. Original edition, The New York Public Library, 1946

“Early 16th Century Scottish Lowland Names,” by Effric neyn Kenyeoch vc Ralte (<http://www.medievalscotland.org/scotnames/lowland16/>)

“15th-Century Scots Names from Dunfermline,” by Aryanhwy merch Catmael (<http://www.ellipsis.cx/~liana/names/scots/dunfermline.html>)

“Names of women mentioned in the Perth Guildry Book 1464-1598,” by Aryanhwy merch Catmael (<http://www.ellipsis.cx/~liana/names/scots/perth.html>)

“Index of Scots names found in *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*,” by Aryanhwy merch Catmael (<http://www.ellipsis.cx/~liana/names/scots/dost/>)

“16th and 17th Century Scots Names from Andrew Melville's *Commonplace Book*,” by Muirgheal inghean Alasdair (<http://www.mulletargent.com/projects/aberdeennames.html>)

“A List of Feminine Personal Names Found in Scottish Records” by Talan Gwynek
(<http://heraldry.sca.org/laurel/names/scottishfem.html>)

“12th Century Scottish Women's Names” by Tangwystyl verch Morgant Glasvryn
(<http://heraldry.sca.org/laurel/names/scott12.html>)

“Names From Old Aberdeen, 1636” by Mari ingen Briain meic Donnchada
(<http://medievalscotland.org/kmo/Aberdeen/>)

Primary source documents:

Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707 (<http://www.rps.ac.uk/>)