

O'Donnell Clan Association (ODCA)

Interim Council

Promoting Clan Renewal: a ten-point plan

Historical background

In ancient times Ireland had a quasi-democratic form of political leadership by chiefs and chieftains of clans, many considered as kings in their own right, under the Gaelic Brehon laws. Even before the completion of English conquest in the 17th century, for its heraldry, kings of arms existed since 1392. The Ulster King of Arms was established on 2 February 1552 by King Edward VI, who recorded in his diary: *There was a King of Arms made for Ireland, whose name was Ulster, and his province was all Ireland; and he was fourth King of Arms, and first Herald of Ireland.* Sometime after independence a century ago, Genealogical Office and the position of Chief Herald of Ireland were created on 1 April 1943, and were pivotal in reviving the Gaelic Clans heritage of Ireland. While the office of Norroy and Ulster King of Arms continues under the College of Arms in London for Northern Ireland and England north of the Trent, the Chief Herald of Ireland absorbed Ulster's functions and role in the newly independent Ireland, and the contents of that office, including all the Registers of Arms, were absorbed by the State. They are now an invaluable resource for the study of our genealogical and heraldic heritage, whilst the College of Arms also maintains further detail on armigers' family members.

About a hundred years ago, Constance Countess de Markievicz in her pamphlet "*What Irish Republicans Stand For*" evoked Padraig Pearse's vision of an Ireland "*not merely free, but Gaelic as well*", and James Connolly's invocation of "*an ardent Irish patriot in his lavish expression of admiration of his Celtic forefathers, who foreshadowed in the democratic organisation of the Irish Clan, the more perfect organisation of the free society of the future*". She credited historian Alice Stopford Green with being "*the great pioneer*" of the work of scientifically "*bringing to light all that she had gleaned from the old documents that survive the systematic destruction of the records of Ireland's greatness by the English*".

The revival of the various Clans and their democratic ethos was to stand against the overly hierarchical "feudal" nature of the imposed social order that devastated Gaelic society centuries before. But this required bringing forth the prominence of leaders who could be regarded as stewards of our vestigial Gaelic heritage, i.e. by the only practical means of identifying the premier surviving lineages, and recognising their contemporary heirs. This led to the gazetting in *Iris Oifigiúil* of the then-known/traced principals, i.e. those whose genealogical seniority seemed proven sufficiently for them to be recognised as "*Chiefs of the Name*". But this was only to be the social catalyst for revival. Once those rare *nominal* chiefs had been identified, the challenge of rebuilding clans remained, requiring not only the mobilisation of prospective members, but the *legitimation* of chiefs by recourse to *elective tanistry*, i.e. the *nominal* chief still had to be inaugurated in the traditional manner by acclamation of a putative *derbfine* and the wider clan. For that, the members of the inner circle, the elective *derbfine* (or indeed as wide as *indfine*), and a prospective assembly of the clan *Oireacht* had to be mobilised.

This led to the first *Rally of the Clans*, announced at the official launching of *An Tóstal* in 1953. The second President of Ireland at the time, Seán T. O'Kelly, declared: "*An Tóstal will be a time of pageantry and national rejoicing, in which the Irish Clans from far and near come together in joyful reunion*". In this, the President appeared to be giving a new, more dignified meaning to the word. In a debate in *Dáil Éireann* shortly afterwards on 16 June 1953, the meaning of the word *Tóstal* was debated, and its suitability was questioned with a reference to an old Irish-English dictionary, by O'Reilly, published in Dublin in 1821 where the word "*Tóstal*" is defined in English as "*arrogance, pride, envy*". However, although the meaning of the adjective *tóstalach* remained "arrogant, conceited", the noun was better defined: "1. *Assemble, muster, array*; 2. **Pageant, tattoo**" (military) by Niall Ó Dónaill (1908-1995) in his dictionary *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla*, published in 1977, complemented by the *English-Irish Dictionary* of Tomás de Bhaldraithe (1916-1996).

The Rally of the Clans took place early the following year, Easter 1954, with the O'Donnell Clan in premier place: it was the last to fold to English domination, and would be the first to arise *phoenix*-like. Thus the O'Donnell Clan Association was born out of the O'Donnell Clan Rally at the Rally of the Clans under the auspices of *An Tóstal*, in Donegal. At the time, this was under the patronage of the Lord Bishop of Raphoe, whose own appointment used to be subject to the *Jus Patronus* of the O'Donnell kings and princes of Tyrconnell. The sanctifying role of the Church had always been a crucial element of inaugurations. Thus after 350 years, a new *Chief of the Clan* John O'Donell of Monkstown, was inaugurated in 1954 with the *derbfine* concurrence of Count Gabriel O'Donell von Tyrconnell, et al. and having been already gazetted as *Chief of the Name* in 1945. This is the legacy we now renew, and mark for its 70th anniversary this year. Back in 1954 a similar inauguration, of Geoffrey O'Donoghue of Enniscorthy, took place in Killarney, County Kerry, in the shadow of Ross Castle.

Current revival and Interim Council

The ODCA has been re-formed and renewed again in 1989, and in 1997, and now in 2024 (process underway). Following consultations between the historic principal branches of the O'Donnell Clan, and several others who had manifested continuing commitment to its renewal, agreement has been reached on a way forward.

This has included renewal of the membership of the ODCA in the encompassing *Clans of Ireland* organisation, following negotiations with that body. Accordingly the ODCA membership in *Clans of Ireland* has been renewed after an extended hiatus of absence. During the past years since the passing of the late Vincent O'Donnell in 2021, the ODCA had effectively ceased to function. This was partly due also to the decease of former members of its "Committee", and other factors.

The impetus for its revival is also partly due to stimulus given by Brendan Rohan's inspired search for the burial place and remains of Red Hugh II O'Donnell in Valladolid; and later the emergence of the new international Red Hugh O'Donnell group, which has helped fill a gap in O'Donnell heritage-related activity, but has also brought a healthy stimulus to Hispanic-Irish relations, and the local communities centred in Lifford and Valladolid.

A panel of six members, bearing the name, were required to be submitted to Clans of Ireland, and accordingly, the following kindly lent their names to this purpose:

1. Don Hugo O'Donnell, KM, 7th Duke of Tetuan (**Madrid**)
2. Mag. Douglas Count O'Donell von Tyrconnell, (**Gmunden Austria**)
3. Dr. Mary Louise O'Donnell, renowned Harpist (**Dublin**)
4. J. Hugh O'Donnell, (**Ontario, Canada**)
5. Seán O'Donnell, (**Newcastle, Co. Down**), &
6. Amb. Francis M. O'Donnell, KM (**Dublin & Vienna**)

An ODCA *Interim Council* has been formed, to replace the former ODCA Committee. As it turns out, for the first time, it includes most representatives of the principal branches, i.e. not just a "*Derbfine*" but the wider circles of agnatic kinship (i.e. as they existed in the 17th century).

The members of the Interim Council are:

- Maria Angeles O'Donnell-Olson, Spanish branch, Dame of the Order of Isabel the Catholic, former Spanish Honorary Consul in San Diego, and active in events of ODCA and COI; in San Diego, USA
- Frank Hannigan, McMenamim paternity, a branch of the O'Donnells of Tyrconnell, entrepreneur/investor, founding partner of StrategyCrowd, SME start-up mentor & coach
- J. Hugh O'Donnell, from Canada with strong networking and management skills and international consultancy experience, who has participated in past ODCA events;
- John McCaffery – University of Auckland New Zealand;. Glassagh/Glashagh Branch; Finn Valley Donegal. With sister Brigid O'Donnell history genealogy since 1980; "herculean genealogical work" previous ODCA events;
- Mary Louise O'Donnell, Harpist & Singer, Fulbright Scholar, Musician-in-Residence with Fingal County Council;
- Seán O'Donnell - in Co. Down, lately returned from abroad, with strong organisation, research & editorial skills, formerly in Lithuania;
- Amb. Francis M. O'Donnell; Tirhugh & Glenties/Glashagh branches; former Delegate of the Clan to, and Director of, Clans of Ireland; Delegate thereto now again; President of the Genealogical Society of Ireland; etc.

A ten-point strategy for the short-term

The *Interim Council* is undertaking the following priorities:

1. Easter 2024 saw the 70th anniversary of the O'Donnell Clan Revival in 1954 and the birth of the first iteration of the O'Donnell Clan Association.
2. Participation in the annual Clans of Ireland AGM and Cultural Summit on 12-13 April. The theme was "*The Historic Buildings/Monuments/Sites associated with Ireland's Clans*", of particular interest not only *viz* Donegal Castle, but for appropriate others inside Ireland and perhaps beyond. In this connection, please note that this year 2024 is the 550th anniversary of the founding of Donegal Castle and Abbey.

3. The Feast of Domhnall (*a quo* O'Donnell?) is marked on Friday, 26 April, as per the *Martyrology of Donegal – A Calendar of Saints of Ireland*, prepared by Mícheál Ó Cléirigh (Tadhg an tsleibhe), of the Four Masters, in the early 17th century (c. 1630). The "Martyrology of Donegal" was begun and finished in the Franciscan Convent of Donegal (the Abbey), on the 19th of April, 1630 after ten years effort, including much undertaken in St. Anthony's in Leuven (Louvain).
4. Provisional adoption by the Council of the revision of the ODCA Constitution, pending its final adoption at the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM), on 9 June 2024, which will also include elections of honorary officers to the statutory Council thenceforth and for limited terms;
5. Updating the list of membership of the ODCA, based qualified criteria of membership including name, date of membership and serial number, and other considerations. There are also a handful who have benefitted from "honorary membership" by dint of invited prominence/ historic participation in leading roles at ODCA events and tours.
6. Preparation for the Clan 70th Anniversary and *Extraordinary General Meeting* (EGM, to be held at Lough Eske Castle Hotel, and via the Zoom electronic platform) provisionally scheduled for the afternoon of Sunday, 9 June 2024, being also the *Feast Day of our Patron Saint St. ColmCille/Columba*.
7. Preparation for the launch of the book "*Memorialising Emigré Dignity*" by the Irish College Leuven, the former Franciscan College of St. Anthony, i.e. compiled research papers that formed the basis of its first webinar of 20 October 2000, by Douglas Count O'Donnell von Tyrconnell; Baron Bernard Snoy et d'Oppuers; Prof. Fr. Mícheál MacCraith, OFM; Dr. Katharine Simms, FRIA; Johan Verberckmoes, KU Leuven; and Amb. Francis M. O'Donnell; introduced by David Grant, CEO, under auspices of the Irish College Leuven. Of interest to the Genealogical Society of Ireland et al.
8. Once the new Constitution is adopted by EGM, officers of the Council elected and an annual membership fee adopted, the Council will re-open membership for new admissions. In this regard, as the Interim Council already includes representatives of the principal branches, they will be encouraged to reach out to their wider constituencies and encourage new admissions, especially of young people.
9. Preparation for commemorating 11 July, the date of the death in 1505 of King *Aodh Ruaidh Ua Domhnaill* (Red Hugh the First), founder of Donegal Town, builder of its Castle and Donegal Abbey, where he is buried (apparently in a crypt until the former high altar), husband of the daughter of O'Connor Faly.
10. Review the current state of Clan and ODCA archives, and establish a conservation strategy, including for objects/art of historical interest. In this regard, the archives built by the late clan genealogist, Rupert O Cochlainn, held in the Old Courthouse/ Lifford Heritage Centre, and maintained by the late Vincent O'Donnell as President Emeritus, will merit special attention. The renovation of the Jacobite wing of Donegal Castle could serve as a *Tyrconnell Heritage Centre*, in cooperation with OPW/Heritage Ireland, the Country Donegal Librarian, the County Donegal Historical Society, and Ballyshannon Museum. Back in 1954 the County Donegal Museum was established at the Franciscan Friary at Rossnowlagh (Ros Nuala), and included the original manuscripts of *The Annals of the Four Masters*, as well as an 18thC chalice made by the Most Rev. Anthony O'Donnell, OFM, Lord Bishop of Raphoe. Today, the County Donegal Museum is housed in Letterkenny.