

**From:** MR MICHAEL BRABAZON michaelbrab@eircom.net   
**Subject:** McHale Clan Reunion 2020 - History Time  
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Dear McHale Clan

McHALE CLAN REUNION 14-16 JULY 2020 AT THE GATEWAY HOTEL, SWINFORD, Co MAYO

Welcome All to 2019! And now we can say, "Next Year Mayo!"

I thought I'd commence the New Year with a bit of McHale Clan history to get the grey cells back in operation (yours and mine). We have only a small number of written fragments with which to work, so every one of them is precious!

If you have any queries on what follows, want to add anything or completely disagree, please feel free. Or you can save it until the Reunion and ask me tricky questions!

For those of you who aren't historically minded, now is your chance to jump in at the deep end. And my advice is to sit down with a nice strong cuppa (tea or coffee, preferably with an additive) when going through the information below.

Firstly, to highlight the Clan as being exclusively Mayo I have attached two locational maps for McHales: Griffith's Valuation 1855/6 and the 1901 census. You can see that McHales mainly stayed put (in Mayo) within Ireland although spreading their wings in the UK, USA and Australia. And more than staying in Mayo, McHales also tended to stay in or close to their own native areas. The main concentration is in and around Turlough, one of our constants, which leads me to believe that McHales have been there since it was established as the main Bourke Clan HQ in the mid 1400s. Previously, the Bourkes ruled from Ballinrobe in south Mayo, the HQ established there by the first Bourke Clan Chief, Edmund Albanach Bourke, in 1333.

The spelling of our name was originally in two basic forms - McKeal and McHeal. Both of these can have an 'e' on the end and the Mc can also be Mac or M'.

In the Flax Growers List for 1796 there is a mix between M'Keal(e) and M'Hale (plus the variant Heal(e)y): <https://www.failteromhat.com/flax1796.php> By the mid 1800s McHale became the dominant spelling with McKeale having virtually disappeared. Other variants like McCale, McCail and McKale were (and sometimes still are) in existence.

I have attached a screenshot (from The History of Mayo by Knox, 1908) of two Mac Keals living in the latter 1700s in Newtown, Co Sligo on the Mayo/Sligo border: <https://www.townlands.ie/sligo/tireragh/castleconnor/castleconor-west/newtown/> Their name became McHale and there were descendants there up until the 1911 census at least. The two Mac Keals are Patrick Snr and Patrick Jnr, both claiming for losses in the 1798 Rebellion.

After the Cromwellian victory in Ireland (1652) (boo!), land was confiscated from many Catholic families and redistributed. The McHales lost out Big Time. A register was compiled detailing landownership before and after the confiscations. I have attached a Word doc with 3 screenshots showing McHale ownership in four townlands (two at Lahardane and two at Killala Bay). As you'll see, the name is written in a number of ways: Mc Keale, Mc Heale, Mc Healy, McShealy. In the Killala area other records show McHely or simply Hely. Take your pick!

The last attachment is a screenshot taken from Elizabethan records 1592/3 pardoning named persons for rebellion against the Crown. On lines 7/8 and 11/12 from the top there are three M'Keales. The first two are described as husbandmen (farmers) and the third as a kern. A kern was a foot-soldier for the more heavily armoured gallowglasses (originally meaning mercenaries). The Bourke Clan settled their territory with farmers-cum-fighters (a productive standing army) so a kern would also be a farmer and a farmer probably a kern. The M'Keale address is Keologeighe which I figured out had to be Ballinglen (a few miles south of Ballycastle). The McDonnells were the gallowglass clan for the Bourkes with their north Mayo HQ at Ballinglen castle. If you go to this page: <http://www.dippam.ac.uk/eppi/documents/17592/page/470227> you'll see the above M'Keales. Click back to the previous page and you'll see the beginning of that section with the McDonnell leadership of north Mayo (Tirawly) at the top of the list, at Keologeighe. Ballinglen castle ruins: <http://goldenlangan.com/ballinglencastle.html>

(In regard to the McKeale names, crone=brown, sallagh=dirty (freckled), bane=fair or white.)

Now just as you were thinking that the original then is McKeale, go again to the Elizabethan record above (another page back): <http://www.dippam.ac.uk/eppi/documents/17592/page/470225> At the end of the 5th line up from the bottom is Shearane M'Heali, address at Ballycastle. So just within a few miles of each other the name is again split between the H and the K versions.

And now we go back a couple of years to 1590 (still the Elizabethan pardon register): <http://www.dippam.ac.uk/eppi/documents/17592/page/470132> 4th line down from the top is Edm[mond] M'Hales of Creingh. This townland is close to Ballinrobe in south Mayo, Kilmaine barony. The Bourke castle there was known as Cloonagashel, around which the town of Ballinrobe grew up. If you look at the top of the page and then go to the previous page, you'll see Cloonagashel in its different spellings with the Bourkes top of the list. So now we have what was assumed to be the later version of our name in 1590 in south Mayo!

Interestingly, this M'Hales record takes us to the heart of the southern Bourke HQ, the original Bourke Clan capital before Turlough (as above). The most southerly parish of Kilmaine barony (and Co Mayo) is Shrule and I made a find a while ago looking through the ancient townland names which may well be relevant. On an old map of Shrule there is CarrownaMakel which in the written record is Carrownaheel. It does look suspiciously like the same Keal/Heal divide! What I need also to say is that the success of the Bourkes in creating what became Co Mayo was the use of its own people to settle the whole territory, creating a large land area (Mayo) ruled by a network of the same families. This was a classic Norman ploy which was used to subdue England after William the Conqueror's invasion. Before the Bourke 'empire' was established each smaller area was dominated by a particular family like the Barretts of north Mayo (Tirawley) and the O'Malleys of Clew Bay. The O'Connors had been the Lords/Kings of Connaught (as well as High Kings of Ireland) before the Bourkes arrived and the Bourkes picked off the local families by peaceful or warlike means one at a time denying the O'Connors any bases.

So we're now down south at the beginning of the Bourke story and most likely the McHale story, in Kilmaine barony. The name for the barony (named after the tribe which settled there) was anciently Conmaicne Cuile Tolad and it remained in use well after the official name change, shortened to Conmaicnecuile. There were a number of Conmaicne ('progeny of Conmac, the son of the hound') tribes across Connaught with identifiers added at the end, in our case Cuile (meaning 'corner'), and close by the Conmaicne Mara (Connemara). The Conmaicne Reine tribe of Leitrim shortened its name to Mac Rene and then Reynolds. Other Conmaicne tribes also took off the 'Con' ('hound'). We know that Conmaicnecuile was used as a person's name as it was applied to one of the Bourkes of Shrule. If we shortened the name further (like the Reynolds) it would become Mac Cuile, which I propose as a contender for the origin of our name. The 'c' at the end of Mac and then at the beginning of Cuile could be the source of the K/H conflict. In order to separate vowel sounds between words in Irish an 'h' is added to the beginning of the second word. It could be the case that Mac Cuile became Mac Uile became Mac hUile, albeit separating a consonant and a vowel. Finally, we must remember that all the records mentioned above are the work of English civil servants transcribing Gaelic names into comprehensible English versions and the emphasis could easily shift back and forth between the 'k' and the 'h' sounds, especially when Mac is reduced to M'. I'm sure our American cousins are well used to the Ellis Island effect!

So, I hear you say, what was our name before it became McKeale/Heale? This is where the DNA project enters the quest. The genetic (male YDNA) origin of McHales lies in the shared-in-common marker BY17745 which we are dating at c.1250-1300. The nearest genetic link we have to another clan via BY17745 is to that of the O'Byrnes of Wicklow. Yes, the O'Byrnes! This discovery is enigmatic, to say the least, for both the McHales and the O'Byrnes - a veritable east-west geographical divide between us. One branch of the O'Byrnes is actually closer to the McHales than the other O'Byrnes. The O'Byrne Clan is the (much) older group with many subdivisions so somehow, sometime an O'Byrne individual or branch went west. Logically, we're then looking for Byrnes in Mayo 1300ish...and low and behold in the Yellow Book of Lecan composed in the very late 1300s there is indeed an O'Birne estate of note at Robeen, just a few miles east of Ballinrobe. This oddity has been dismissed as a branch of the O'Beirnes of north Roscommon but nothing fits, not genetically, not socially, not geographically. From the Irish O Braoin/Broin, the variants besides O'Byrne/Birne are Brown, O'Brien and Breen. Birn/Byrne, O'Brien and Brown are all found in south Mayo in the early records and through to the present - people and places. (O'Breen appears to be a later Anglicisation of the name, so not contemporaneous.)

Where is the source of these O'Birnes? All the way over to Wicklow, or the O'Byrnes reputed previous location in Kildare? Well, there is a halfway house at Athlone. The O Braoins/O'Breens of Brawny (at Athlone) were an ecclesiastical clan (a sept of the O Braoins of the Conmaicne tribe of what became Clononane barony, Athlone) which provided not only regular priests and monks for the Church but also some high-fliers:

1088 - Tiegernach O Braoin - Abbot of Clonmacnoise

1187 - Gilla-Isa, the son of Oilioll O'Breen, Sech-Abb [Prior] of Hy-Many - historian, scribe, poet.

1231 - Stephen O'Breen, erenagh of Mayo Abbey, died.

The chroniclers' list continues, but it is this third entry, concerning Stephen O'Breen/O Braoin which is of interest to us. The erenaghs were part clergy(ish), part estate manager. In fact they wielded a lot of power within the monastic system, at times virtually treating the lands as their own and the position as hereditary. Co Mayo gets its name from Mayo Abbey, or rather the diocese of which it was the ecclesiastical centre. The Mayo Abbey estate was vast reaching down to Ballinrobe, the River Robe

diocese of which it was the ecclesiastical centre. The Mayo Abbey estate was vast reaching down to Ballinrobe, the river Rode being the boundary between its and Cong Abbey's jurisdictions. The timing and place would work very well as the connector to the O'Birnes of Robeen.

To give an idea of distance between Mayo Abbey and Ballinrobe/Robeen, here is the google map:  
<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Mayo+Parks,+Mayo+Abbey/@53.6895761,-9.2112464,11.5z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x485958f4ca7f9411:0x2600c7a819bb1b42!8m2!3d53.7621669!4d-9.1198601> Not a million miles away but also not a next door neighbour. The question it raises is why would the Ballinrobe area be of such importance that the Abbey erenagh would choose to live there? Long(ish) explanation (but interesting)...

The ancient church at Ballinrobe, now in ruins in Carnalecka graveyard, was previously named the Holy Rood church, which is Anglo-Saxon for the church of the True Cross. And that church is believed to stand on the site of a 6th century church founded by St Ruadhain, an important early church father of Irish Christianity. His full name was Ruadhain mac Fergusa Birn ("born near Tara"). The founder of Mayo Abbey in 668AD was St Colman (said to be a Conmaicne nobleman) who had left the holy island of Lindisfarne in 664AD with a group of Saxon monks having been in disagreement with the Catholic (i.e. Roman) domination of the Council of Whitby (664). They carried away with them monastic treasures which they brought to the Plain of Yews (Magh Eo) to found their new religious house. The most important relic was a piece of the True Cross, the Holy Rood (in Saxon 'halig rod'), which I believe was housed in St Ruadhain's reconstructed church. Mayo Abbey was known as 'Mayo of the Saxons' and became a great centre of learning of international renown, hence the diocese (later absorbed by Tuam) and then the county name (established in 1585). I have looked at old location names close to the Holy Rood church and several appear to contain the word for pilgrim: 'eltie' - a truncated form, I believe, of oilithreach (Old Irish ailithre). In Scottish it is eilthreach and Lindisfarne is off the coast of the English/Scottish border. The Augustinian Abbey in Ballinrobe which was founded in the early 1300s, either by the Bourkes or their predecessors the Fitzgeralds, on the opposite side of the river from Holy Rood church was known as Holy Cross Abbey (and the townland name is Cornecroy, 'district of the cross'). The purpose was to house in one devotional location a number of hermits in the area, a sign that it was a sacred site (there were also female hermits who were later housed in a convent close by). There is actually more to this story (of Robeen as an ancient royal centre of the Conmaicnecuile tribe) but I'll rest my case at this point. Suffice to say that my thesis gives the O'Birnes of Robeen a particularly important social position at the time of the establishment of the Bourke Clan HQ in 1333 at Ballinrobe and that's exactly what we're looking for, i.e. a small family group with high status (which carried the social privilege of polygamy with increased progeny) c.1300 living close to the original Bourke HQ and carrying the name O'Birne. (One additional note, there were recorded Birne landowners around Robeen up to the mid 1600s.)

Ruins of Carnalecka/Holy Rood church: [http://www.historicalballinrobe.com/page\\_id\\_\\_168.aspx](http://www.historicalballinrobe.com/page_id__168.aspx)

Lesson over - take a break!

As you can see, I am attempting to construct a Mac Hale Clan history and any assistance is most welcome. Sometimes a single piece of information can support or amend the narrative, so keep your eyes peeled and report any finds or insights you think may be relevant. I cut my investigative teeth over many years with Brabazon history, a substantial amount of it proving to be either incorrect or misleading. In regard to McHale history, one of the versions that our work to date demolishes is that part of the McHale Clan is descended from Welsh Howells who supposedly settled in north Mayo (Tirawley), adding Mac to the name. I haven't come across one reference to such a name in Mayo in the course of my research (only one writer after another repeating the unknown original source) but please let me know if I have missed it. In any event, the YDNA results do not support such a claim. They, the YDNA results, as well as timing constraints, also rule out the McHales as a junior branch of the McDonnells of Tirawley, another version I have noted and investigated.

As a rule of thumb, any version of McHale history which doesn't make reference to Bourke history is a non-starter, and the spread of Bourke society from south to north Mayo is integral. The oft-repeated guess that the Mac Céile/Cele/Kele erenaghs of Killala (13th century) are McHale ancestors immediately falls at this particular hurdle. Not only weren't they part of Bourke Clan society, they were very much under the O'Connors whose influence retreated (in the face of the expanding Bourke fiefdom) into Sligo along with many of their associated families.

As above, please feel free to question and/or comment. Remember our motto is...

LE CHÉILE!

Michael Brabazon

PS I tried without success in 2018 to get an article on the McHales of Mayo into the popular magazine History Ireland. However, nil desperandum, I will be seeing the editor Tommy Graham at the Mayo History Conference in Swinford in two months and will discuss the matter. I think I need to broaden the scope to make it attractive to a wider audience. If the Conference is deemed to be a winner I can use the kudos to further our McHale project.

## 226 APPENDIX TO SIXTEENTH REPORT OF THE DEPUTY

1592-3.

FIANTS—ELIZABETH.

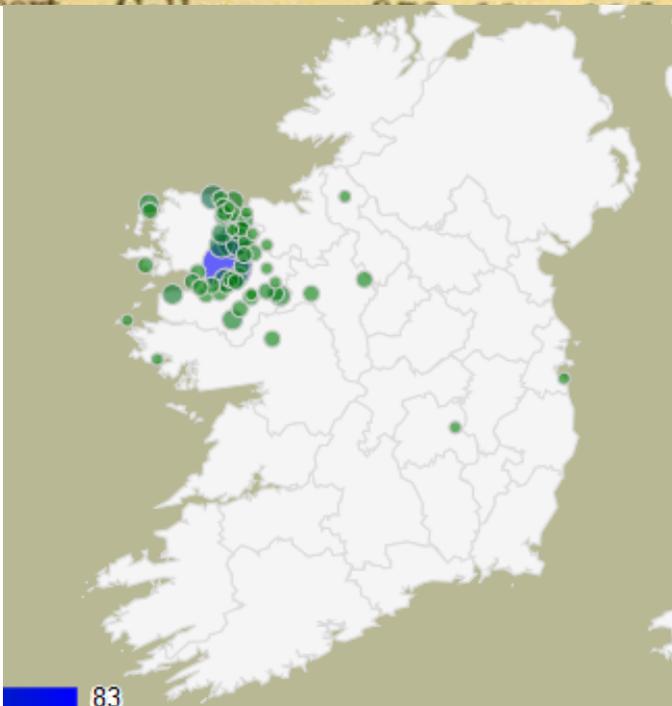
O Mulcleighe, of Lishgowre, Cormock Mowrnegh, of sam

husb., Edm. M'Stephen, of the Corran, and Shane m'Moyler  
m'Walter M'Stephen, of same, gentlemen, Edm. boy and Davi  
m'Wm. M'Moyler, of same, kerns, Moyler ro M'Stephen, c  
Belavarie, and Walter m'Moiler M'Stephen, of same, gentlemer  
Teige boy M'Gillallen, of Keologelieghe, Cahill M'Gillaller  
Walter duffe M'Cahill, Wm. crone M'Keale, Shan sallag  
M'Keale, Rich. m'Farrieghe O Kenevan, Rich. m'Owen keog  
O Kenevan, Owen duffe O Flin, and Rory O Flin, husbandmer  
Shane M'Gillallien, kern, Gilleduff O Kearney, husb., Moilmurr  
m'Tirlagh M'Artor, galloglas, Eneas O Higen, husb., Moylerr  
bane M'Keale, Edm. boy Breinagh, Tho. reogh m'Gilleduff  
bane, kerns, and Hugh O Howley, husb., of same place, Onor



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MacKeal, Patrick, Jr., Newtown, £8 6s. 10d.; MacKeal, Pat  
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Robert, G. H.



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