



## A family's heraldic heritage *The O'Donnells of Tyrconnell & Ardfert*

by Francis M. O'Donnell  
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The arms of the *O'Donnells of Tyrconnell* derive from those legendarily bestowed in the 5<sup>th</sup> century on Prince Conall, son of the High King of Ireland, Niall Naoigiallaigh, and progenitor of the Cenel Conaill people and after whom the land of *Tír Chonaill* (Tyrconnell) is called, and of which the O'Donnells were the principal kings and princes for many centuries.

Whilst coats-of-arms were not generally assumed as heraldic devices until the 12<sup>th</sup> century, shields and banners have been emblazoned with symbols of their bearers from the most ancient antiquity, as evidenced in Roman Empire times with the *Labarum* of Emperor Constantine the Great.

The antiquity of the use of an individualized identifying shield by Irish nobles pre-dates the emergence of “coats of arms”, originally worn over suits of armor, in feudal Europe. This is evidenced by the historical record in *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn - History of Ireland*, Part II, Book I, Chapter XXXIX, written by Geoffrey Keating, D.D., completed in 1633/1634 (translated and edited by Rev. Patrick S. Dineen, published by the Irish Texts Society, London, 1908). In that work, the author describes the times and legacy of King Tuathal Teachtmhar (about two

thousand years ago) and how the nobles attending the triennial *Feis* at Tara, the ancient royal capital of Ireland, were seated below their individual shields.

These shields bore marks of their identity and were hung by hook from a beam that ran the length of the banqueting hall. On their arrival, the shield-bearer of the nobles concerned handed over the shield to the *boltsaire* (marshall of the house) and on the instructions of the *seancha*, he then placed the shields to hang from the beam, ranked according to the noble's title.

An early record of such lies in the *Book of Leinster*, compiled around 1160, where it is said that in the year 634, Congal, king of the Cruithne of *Dál nAraidi* in eastern Ulster, and briefly High-King of Ireland, had a green banner with a golden lion.

In further ancient sources, such as the *Life and Acts of Saint Patrick* (chapter 138) by Jocelyn of Furness (c. 1185 AD; he was so commissioned by Sir John de Courcy, according to John O'Donovan in his translation of the *Annals of the Four Masters*, vol. III, p.33), St. Patrick took his staff, known as the staff of Jesus, or *Bacall Iosa*, which he had obtained mysteriously

during a pilgrimage to Rome, and struck the shield of Prince Conall (brother of Laoghaire, who succeeded their father Niall Naoigiallaigh as High King of Ireland), rendering a sign of the Cross on it:

*et mox cum baculo suo, qui baculus  
Jesu dicebatur Crucis signum ejus  
scuto impressit, asserens neminem  
de stirpe ejus in bello vincendum qui  
signum illud,*

and told him that those who would bear that sign in battle would be victorious, and that many saints and nations would proceed from him and be blessed.

This happened at Conall's residence at a place now known as Donaghpatrick, about nineteen kilometers northwest of Tara, and very close to where the Tailteann games and marriage feasts were held. It was clearly intended as a spiritual vocation, a religious duty, more than as a device of military valour, a response to Conall's willingness to lead a monastic life.

Furthermore, from the perspective of later heraldic significance, and on a vexillological level as such, the bestowal of the symbol of the Holy Cross on the shield of a prince of the royal family of Ireland, a *fons honoris* in its own regal right, by the Church's *Apostle of Ireland*, St. Patrick, can be seen as a very early exercise of the Holy See's supreme authority as the ultimate *fons honoris*, being the overlord of all royalty in those times, the era of Christendom, and through whom the "divine right" of kings to rule was consecrated (*vide* so-called "Donation of Constantine").

We learn also from *The Life and Acts of Saint Patrick* by Jocelyn (ch. XXXVIII "Of Conallus and his shield, in *The Most Ancient Lives of Saint Patrick* by Rev. James O'Leary D.D., 1904):

*And Saint Patrick addressed his well-beloved, the Prince Conall; and he enquired of him whether*

*would he assume the habit of a monk. And the prince replied that his heart was prepared to do whatsoever the saint would command. Then the saint rejoicing at his devotion said unto him, "For the sign of power and protection, and for the proof of thy spiritual worth, shall thou bear thy shield and thy sceptre; the name of a laic shalt thou show; but the mind and the merit of a monk shall thou possess, inasmuch as many saints shall proceed from thee, and many nations shall in thy seed be blessed." And he signed his shield with the sign of the staff of Jesus, declaring that no one of his progeny who should carry this shield in battle should ever by anyone be vanquished. And the chronicles of Hibernia declare, and her bards record, that this the saint's prophecy unto Conall and his seed duly came to pass.*

And Saint Patrick told him that he would be known as *Conall Sciath Bachall*, Conall of the Shield of the Staff of Jesus.

This origin of these arms was also recorded by the medieval Gaelic poet Eoin Ruadh Mac an Bhaird who composed a poem recounting the ancient tradition that these arms were granted by St. Patrick, written in *the Lebhar Inghine I Dhomhnaill – the Book of O'Donnell's Daughter*, written at the Irish Franciscan College of Saint Anthony in Louvain in the early 1600s and held today in the Bibliothèque Royale in Brussels.

The motto ascribed has always been *In Hoc Signo Vincas*, recalling the vision of Emperor Constantine the Great, and his conversion at Saxa Rubra before the battle of the Milvian Bridge, and as emblazoned on his *Labarum*.

It may well be, as speculated by some, that it was under the influence of Maria *aka* Fionnghuala *Iníon Dubh* (second wife of Sir

Hugh Dubh MacManus O'Donnell, 23<sup>rd</sup> O'Donnell) being a MacDonnell herself, that the O'Donnell arms took the very particular form of a passion cross upheld by an arm – the MacDonnells/MacDonalds of Scotland have just such a blazon emanating from a cloud. But we should not doubt that the principal motif of the O'Donnell arms is and has always been the Cross: a hand clasping and arm upholding it were only ancillary features, of probable later introduction, and not an original essential feature.

Consistent with the original tradition, the duly differentiated full achievement of arms of the present writer is recorded in the *Register of Grants and Confirmations* of the Office of the Chief Herald, with supporters, in volume Aa, folio 72, based on an earlier registration in volume Z.



*The Arms of O'Donnell of Ardfert,  
Francis Martin O'Donnell*

The genealogy traces through John O'Donnell of Ardfert (1804-1879) and his predecessors, whose tomb lay inside Ardfert Cathedral, (beside the mausoleum of the FitzMaurices, Barons of Kerry and Lixnaw, with whom these O'Donnells were allied since the 1600s). The old family homestead dating from late 1600s/early 1700s lies at Tubridmore, Tubrid, Ardfert, in the Barony of Clanmaurice, County Kerry, and was

listed as an historic object (RPS KY-021-003) of Architectural Heritage in the *Record of Protected Structures* in the Kerry County Development Plan 2015-2021 (Chapter 11 – Built and Cultural Heritage).

These Arms are closest in form to the arms of the O'Donnells of France, a now-extinct line of Counts, who held their ultimate origin derived from exile from Donegal (i.e. the town, former capital of Tyrconnell), albeit apparently via County Kerry, and indeed most obviously through Ardfert.

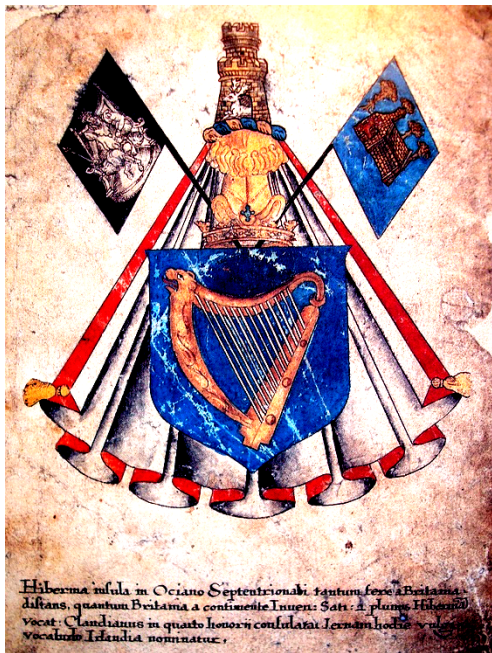
Genealogical evidence indicates they were an off-shoot of the *O'Donnells of Ardfert* in the Barony of Clanmaurice, in north County Kerry, exiled with the Jacobite army to France in the 1690s, unlike their kinsman Lieutenant Thomas O'Donnell who appears on record in 1699 as hailing from Aghanacrinna adjacent to Ardfert in Clanmaurice, Kerry, and of the same family as this armiger whose great-great-grandfather John O'Donnell was the only and last O'Donnell to hold land at the same place, or anywhere in the parish of Killahan.

This and other indicators attest in a tangible manner to the family heritage of descent from an *O'Donnell of Tyrconnell* (Tír Chonail), who settled there for a while around the time of the Battle of Kinsale, c. 1601+. The identity of that ancestor, traced in the pardons of King James I/VI, is Donal Oge O'Donnell, son of Sir Donal O'Donnell, Sheriff of Donegal and *Seneschal of Tyrconnell*, eldest son of King Sir Hugh Dubh O'Donnell, and half-brother of princes Red Hugh and Sir Rory O'Donnell, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Tyrconnell.

To the line of Rory O'Donnell's nephew and first cousin (through their grandmother), Donal Oge O'Donnell and his heirs, is owed the ultimate remainder to his titles for the Lordship and Earldom of Tyrconnell and his Barony of Donegal, as per the original letters patent, and the continental recognition as *Princeps*.

The primary colours of the shield, supporters, mantle and banner, are the royal tinctures of the old Kingdom of Ireland, *azure* and *or*, (blue and gold). They are the same as the old arms and flag of the Kingdom of Ireland bearing a golden harp on an azure field (Manuscript 34 in the Office of the Chief Herald), or the earlier Lordship of Ireland (azure three crowns gold). The azure here is *Royal Azure*, a deep azure close to a strong indigo.

This deep azure also hearkens back to *Gormfhlaithe*, the name of several queens of Ireland associated with Tara in ancient Gaelic annals, and which comes from a compound of *gorm* (blue) and *flaithe* (sovereign). The sovereignty of ancient Ireland, *Flaitheas Eireann*, was often symbolized by a woman in an azure cloak.



The ancient Arms of the Kingdom of Ireland

The earliest Arms of Ireland, the gold harp on an azure field, are described in an entry that reads: *Le Roi d'Irlande, D'azur à la harpe d'or*, in a 13<sup>th</sup> century French roll of arms known as the *Wijnbergen Roll*, now preserved in The Hague, in the Netherlands.

These were also originally the emblem of King David of Israel as depicted here from a

Portuguese armorial, the *Livro do Armeiro Mor*, an illuminated manuscript dating back to 1509, during the reign of King Manuel I of Portugal:



King David of Israel

They are similarly depicted in the arms of the French noble families *David de Beauregard*, and *David d'Allonson*.

The same tinctures are found in the flag of Europe, bearing a circle of twelve gold stars on a blue field. Azure also signifies truth and loyalty, and gold signifies generosity and elevation of mind, and resonates with the circumstances of origin, education, and vocation. These colours are consistently applied throughout the current O'Donnell shield, supporters, mantle, and cap of dignity, yielding an exceptional harmony throughout the full heraldic achievement.

The shield, *azure in dexter chief a cross crosslet or*, carries a cross motif consisting of four passion crosses aligned compasswise, per the four corners of the Earth, forming a representation of evangelical universality, and evoking the Four Gospels. This blazon is also rather like Constantine's vision of a golden Christian symbol replacing the golden Sun in an azure sky.

The supporters, a bull and a lion rampant, are those of the noble branches of the dynasty of O'Donnell of Tyrconnell, with the traditional tinctures of the same, azure on the dexter and gold on the sinister, but with the positions of the supporters reversed, such that the bull is on the dexter, and the lion on sinister, and resulting in the bull being azure and the lion being gold, the more natural tinctures of these beasts, as they were also so coloured on the arms of the O'Donnell Counts in Austria. Each bears the charge of a cross-crosslet on the shoulder. The lion rampant symbolizes *royalty and strength*, facing dexter in heraldic norm, and also hearkens back to the three lions of Milesius, and in particular, the one representing his son, Heremon, mythical High-King of Ireland, and ancestor of the O'Donnells; it also concords with the tradition of portraying a lion in the arms of a noble chief. The bull represents *bravery, fortitude and generosity*, and hearkens to its use as his seal by Red Hugh O'Donnell and later as a supporter on the arms of his brother Rory, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Tyrconnell, and is consistent with the pastoral aspect of the current armiger's diverse heritage.

The position of the cross-crosslet *in chief* in the shield indicates *wisdom, authority, dominion, and victory*, and its portrayal is also an indicator of a Crusader heritage. A golden cross-crosslet in an azure field is also an early Crusader emblem, and a variation of this appears as four golden *fleurs-de-lys* forming a cross in an azure lozenge under a principal archway of the former Basilica of the Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) in Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul).

Such a blazon also appears as a knight's shield amongst others in a boat depicting the departure of King Louis IX on crusade, and featured in *Le Roman de Godefroy de Bouillon et de Saladin, 1337*, captioned "*comment le Roy Louis, le quart de la lignée Huon Capet ainsi nommés, à la grond ost outremer sur les Sarrasins*" (ref. 22495, folio 287, *Bibliothèque Nationale Française*, nouvelles acquisitions françaises).

Somewhat different, but not unlike these, a French viscount, Eudes Herpin (Odo Arpin/Erpin) of Bourges, appears recorded as a Crusader at the taking of Jerusalem in 1101. His arms were "*d'azur une Croix d'or a Croisette d'or recroisettée*"; after defeat and release, he visited Pope Paschal II, and on his advice retired to the monastery of Cluny. However, according to another account, of the Salle des Croisades in Versailles, his arms consisted of a strolling sheep against a red field, i.e. *de gueules un mouton d'argent* according to the *Armorial de Goussencourt*. His son, Robert Erpen de Sauliers (or de Sully) accompanied William the Conqueror to England, and some of his descendants called Orpen settled in Kenmare, county Kerry, ancestors of Blennerhassets and others. According to John Burke's *Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Commoners of Great Britain and Ireland (Vol. IV, 1838)*, one of these Orpens of Kenmare was an agent for prominent Catholic families of Kerry, leasing their lands when they were prohibited from land ownership after 1696.

More appropriately, the French families Le Marlorat, in Barrois, and De Gayon du Bousquet in Vivarais both have arms *d'azur, à la croix recroisettée d'or*, according to the *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de la noblesse de France*, by Nicolas Viton de Saint-Allais (1773-1842), published in Paris in 1816.

According to the office of the Chief Herald of Ireland, the use of the cross-crosslet in the letters patent of arms for this armiger is also "*reminiscent of the Cross of Jerusalem*". This echoes his silver *Cross of Honour of Jerusalem*, from the *Custodia Franciscalis Terrae Sanctae* on 25 September 1965, and his later investiture as a Knight Commander of the Most Noble Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

The motto of the O'Donnells of Tyrconnell, proclaiming *In Hoc Signo Vincas*, recalls the global evangelization inspired by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine the Great's conversion and a sense of global mission,

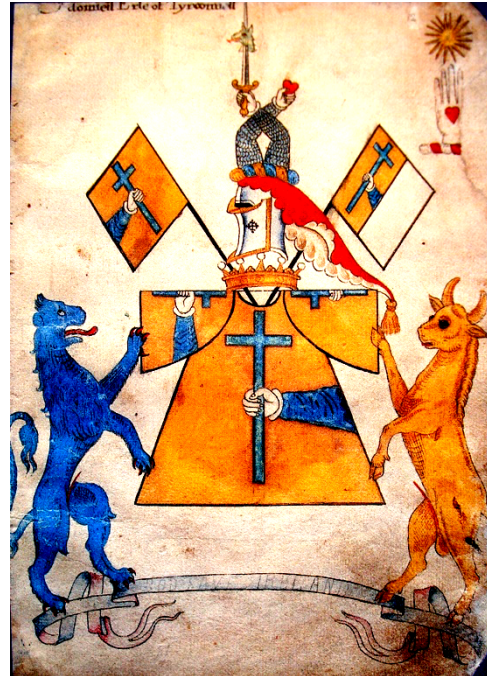
echoed in the career and legacy of this O'Donnell armiger, and his father, in the service of the United Nations. The cross-crosslet is also echoed in the bottony pattern of the original mantling, exceptionally intricate indicating wide experience, and as a charge on the shoulder of each supporter.

The combination of the cross and this motto, recalls the Constantinian *labarum*, and the derivative historic arms of the O'Donnells of Tyrconnell, and in particular are a creative differentiation of those of the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Tyrconnell, Prince Rory O'Donnell, whose arms are registered in Manuscript 34 of the Genealogical Office of the Chief Herald of Ireland, and whose sister-in-law, Elizabeth (FitzGerald), was the 1<sup>st</sup> wife of the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Fingal, a peerage title now extinct.

An older title to Fingal (part of which forms the modern Fingal County, the major part of the ancient Pale) was held by grand serjeanty by Hugh de Lacy, whose son Walter de Lacy held tenure as Lord of Fingal for seven knights' fees, by charter of King John in 1208. Through male & female ancestors the armigers' family descend *inter alia* from Walter de Lacy, Lord of Fingal, where this armiger grew up. *Ex jure matris*, the current armiger has been so listed in *The Gazette*, the official public record in London, England, in his capacity as trustee of a British charity.

Unknown to most members of the O'Donnell Clan today, according to G.O. Ms 34, said to date from as early as 1590 and briefly thereafter, Rory O'Donnell, the Prince-Earl's shield was also *Azure and Or* (blue and gold), albeit with a blue passion cross and gold field, the cross-crosslet featuring as a badge on his peer's helm.

The supporters consisted of a blue lion and a golden bull. As previously mentioned, the emblem of the bull was used on the seal of his brother, Prince Red Hugh O'Donnell.



*The Arms of the Prince Rory O'Donnell  
1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Tyrconnell (Ms. 34)*

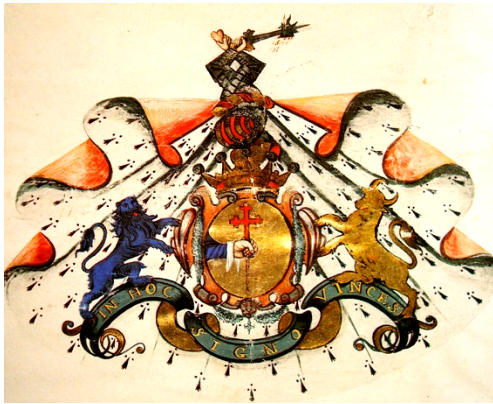
Ms.34 was discovered in an old country house near Baltinglass by a Rev. Fr. Dunne, who brought it to Sir Arthur Vicars, Ulster King of Arms, who annotated observations therein on 17 May 1901, to the effect that he recognized it as having at one time belonged to the Ulster King of Arms' office. He had it subsequently purchased and returned, and later repaired by the British Museum.



*Prince-Earl Rory's Arms as on his tombstone in the Church  
of San Pietro in Montorio in Rome*

However, later versions of the Prince-Earl's arms contained other variations. His tombstone (above) in the Church of San Pietro in Montorio in Rome portrays a red passion cross held from the left rather than the right, and with the supporting lion in gold (instead of blue), as well as the bull.

A later articulation of Rory's arms, by the Athlone Herald at the Jacobite Court of Saint Germain-en-Laye on 5 April 1709, on the occasion of a confirmation of arms to Daniel/Donal O'Donnell of Ramelton (dsp) 3<sup>rd</sup> cousin of Rory's son, Hugh "Albert" O'Donnell the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Tyrconnell, (dsp.), portrays a *cross-crosslet fitchée*.



*A Jacobite version of Prince-Earl Rory's Arms.*

Hugh *Albert* O'Donnell's testamentary heir was his second cousin twice removed, Hugh *Balldearg* O'Donnell. Balldearg didn't get the peerage he wanted and switched sides many times. He mis-appropriated the title of Earl, although recognized as a count in Spain. He died without offspring. In February 1692 his forces were disbanded in Ireland, only to regroup abroad under the Habsburg Emperor. They were about 2,200 men. Command was given to Bryan Magennis, Viscount of Iveagh, who died penniless in debt, whereupon the regiment was disbanded in 1692. They had been garrisoned in Petrovaradin (then part of Hungary, but now in Serbia's Vojvodina province, overlooking the city of Novi Sad, and the Danube River), where "*the officers by debauchery and the private soldiers for mere want, have fallen into the distemper of*

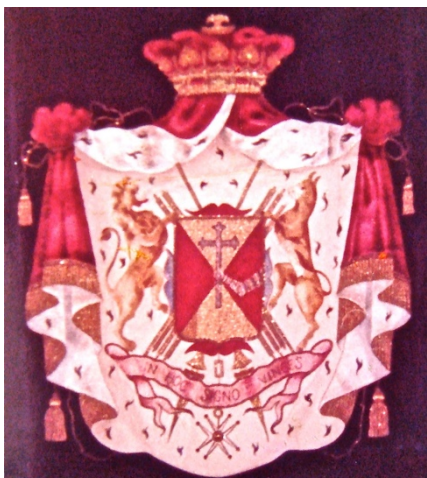
*the country and in three months' time are melted like snow - of 1,700 men, scarce 200 are upon their legs"*.

Even so, Rory's Earl of Tyrconnell original patent passed to the O'Donnells of Austria, second cousins thrice-removed from Balldearg, and five-times removed from Hugh Albert, 2<sup>nd</sup> and last Earl of Tyrconnell. The Austrian O'Donnells bear a variation of these arms, in one case emblazoned with the Habsburg arms, for Count Maximilian O'Donell von Tyrconnell, who helped save the life of Emperor Franz Josef from an assassin in 1853 on Vienna's M $\ddot{o}$ lkerbastei.



*The Arms of Maximilian O'Donell von Tyrconnell*

The Spanish O'Donnells bear the O'Donnell arms in a similar version, and in a form *per saltire or and gules*, originally dictated by the King of Spain. Following the death on 11 July 2023 of the Rev. Fr. Hugh Ambrose O'Donnell, OFM, titular *Chief of the Name*, the proven genealogical seniority now falls to S.E. Don Hugo O'Donnell y Duque de Estrada, 7<sup>th</sup> Duke of Tetuan, a Grandee in Spain. Fr. Hugh's father, the late John O'Donel of the Larkfield line succeeded in 1932, was gazetted in *Iris Oifigiúil* as Chief of the Name in 1945 and was inaugurated as *Ua Domhnaill* of *Clan Dálaigh* in 1954.



*The Arms of the O'Donnells of Spain,  
Dukes of Tetuan and Counts of Lucena, etc.*

However, as per the patent rolls & related grants in 1603 of King James, the Lordship of Tyrconnell and title of Earl were entailed to the children of Rory O'Donnell, of a *cadet* branch, with remainder to his brother Cathbharr, all of whom were extinguished in the male line, and the ultimate remainder of the Lordship of Tyrconnell to Donal Oge O'Donnell. It was also the *cadet* line that was last recognized, through Red Hugh, Rory and his son Hugh Albert, in Habsburg Austrian, Spanish and Papal realms, as *Prince of Tyrconnell*, divergent from the genealogical seniority. This and related titles are subject to succession by primogeniture, and not to the Brehon laws of Tanistry.

The line of the *O'Donnells of France*, mentioned earlier and recognized as Counts through at least four generations, was extinguished in the male line in 1879. They held very strong connections with County Kerry but even in exile commemorated their ultimate origin in Donegal, i.e. the town, capital of Tyrconnell. They are mentioned as of the *Princes de Tirconnell* in the Royal Irish Academy's collection of the French manuscripts of Amédée de la Ponce.

According to Rietstap, the arms of O'Donnell of France were: *D'azur à un senestrochère de carnation paré d'azur tenant une croix recroisettée au pied fiché d'or*; also expressed: (Un écusson) *d'azur*,

*un bras paré d'eau [aqua] tenant une croix recroisettée (dexter) au pied fiché d'or*. These are almost identical to the arms of O'Donnell of Ardfert, except that in the latter, the cross-crosslet lies in dexter chief, without being upheld by an arm and hand.



*The Arms of the Counts O'Donnell in France,  
as recorded by Rietstap & Rolland,*

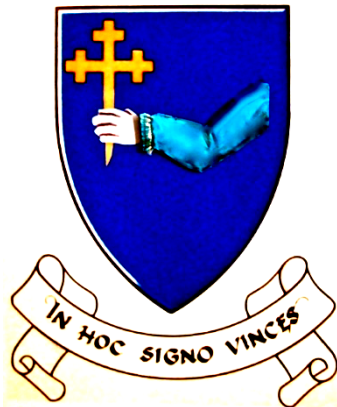
These French O'Donnells descended from Sean, John, i.e. *Jean O'Donnell* as recorded in French. He was the son of Edmond O'Donnell and Catherine Geyles (Giles) of Ardfert, Ireland, who were born in the mid-1600s in Ireland, namely in County Kerry. The family had a strong connection to Kerry in Ireland, and John married Marie-Louise Falvey, who also came from Kerry.

The family claimed descent from the O'Donnells of Tyrconnell, and the correspondence of Comte Jean-Louis Barthelemy O'Donnell in the 1850s indicated his family tradition of an *exile from Donegal*. It also indicated that he had full information (lost to us now) about his family's origin from earliest times up to the time of the exile. It was the relationship with the O'Donnells of Austria and Spain that was less clear to him, as they were later emigrés from Ireland.

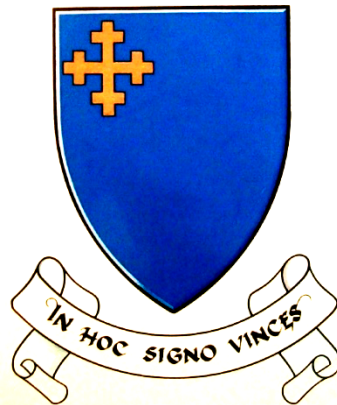


It was the view of Charles Joseph O'Donel at the time that these French counts were a branch of the same Tyrconnell family, as “we have all the same name and the same arms” (his letter of 30 April 1854 to Viscount Sigismund Anatole O'Donnell) and his correspondence with Comte Jean and his son died out in the late 1800s, mainly due to the extinction of that family in France with Sigismund's death in 1879.

At that time he had already disavowed the O'Donnells of Limerick and Clare (whose arms he considered nonsensical and unrelated to those of the Tyrconnell dynasty) as unrelated directly to the O'Donnells of Tyrconnell, disputing a seemingly erroneous genealogy by Roger O'Ferrall in his *Linea Antiqua* of 1709.



Corrected non-hatched version of the Arms of the O'Donnell Counts in France



Shield of the O'Donnells of Ardfert, and closest resembling the O'Donnells of France, but in a purer form, and closest to the original arms granted by St. Patrick to Conall, progenitor of the O'Donnells of Tyrconnell.

Charles Joseph O'Donel would have therefore been very careful about any recognition of the Counts O'Donnells of France, but one factor in favour was the very close similarity of the arms. But he was unable in his lifetime to fully trace their linkage to the Tyrconnell descendants in Austria and Spain. However, that linkage is now better documented and articulated.

The O'Donnells of Ardfert from whom descends this armiger, appear thus in direct line to Donal Oge O'Donnell, with the remainders to Tyrconnell and subsidiary hereditaments, and to the French *Comtes* O'Donnell, written and signed also *Ô Donnell*, the *accent circonflexe* over the "O" indicating nobility in France, like the *particule nobiliaire* of the *ancien régime*.

Even if Ireland's Constitution (*Bunreacht na hÉireann*) holds restrictive provisions in article 40.2, as forms of incorporeal property, the Tyrconnell & subsidiary titles have now been nominally rehabilitated by virtue of Irish *Statute Law Revision Act, Number 28 of 2007*, signed on 8 May 2007, and under which the Attainder of 1614 was repealed, in particular the old Statutes of the pre-Union Irish Parliament Acts 11, 12, & 13 James 1, c.4, (although these titles continued to be recognized in the Spanish realm, and by the Papacy, and on the Continent beyond 1614, and indeed the title of Prince as recognized on the Continent).

Without official heraldic sanction, over time, a borrowed version of these general elements has served as the assumed “clan arms” of O'Donnells of Tyrconnell, including the Clan Association: expressed: *Or, issuing from the sinister an arm dexter sleeved azure and cuffed argent, with hand proper upholding a passion cross gules*. It is the most common form, associated with the sale of many artifacts to tourists, who are unfortunately mistakenly led to believe that they thereby share in the ownership of the arms as such, although a practice of “clan arms” as assumed arms, has evolved.



Generic assumed "O'Donnell Arms"

The current armiger's father also commissioned, owned and displayed a heraldic artist's exemplification (above) of such "O'Donnell Arms", a document now owned by his son.

In contrast, the arms of the Ardfert branch expressing the foregoing O'Donnell features articulate the evangelical and universal charge of the cross-crosslet *in chief*, in patriarchal style, this cross-crosslet having previously appeared as a badge on the Earl of Tyrconnell's helmet in his achievement of arms, and later in *fitchée* form as the principal charge (but gules) in the Jacobite 1709 version of the Earl's arms.

In the current Patents, as in the arms of the French O'Donnell Counts, it is elevated to become the principal charge, and *in chief*, and with colours inverted so that the cross-crosslet is now in gold, and the field is blue. In this way, the cross-crosslet shines in place of the sun high in an azure sky, just as the Constantinian vision beheld the symbol of Christ (whether cross or labarum) aloft in the sky replacing *Sol Invictus*, the true God replacing the pagan one.

There is now a greater purity of reference from the meaning of the traditional O'Donnell motto, which clearly relates uniquely to the Cross, without any arm or

hand holding it, and as depicted in a bas-relief sculpted on a column in the Cathedral of St Eunan and St Columba in Letterkenny, seat of the Diocese of Raphoe. In it, St. Patrick is depicted striking, with *Bacall Íosa*, the shield of Prince Conall, with the sign of the Cross, in complete fidelity with the original legend (below).



St. Patrick inscribes a cross on Conall's shield

This is quite compatible with the earliest and most fundamental arms of the O'Donnells of Tyrconnell, as Charles Joseph O'Donel held in 1850 that these arms were the only legitimate arms of the race of Conall (he disavowed peculiar arms granted by Ulster King of Arms, Sir William Betham, in the 1850s to the O'Donnells of Limerick/Clare who claimed descent from *Sean a Lurg*, son of Turlough an Fhiona O'Donnell).

C.J. O'Donel, in his correspondence of 12 November 1850, with Sir William Betham, cited the antiquity of the O'Donnell arms consisting of the cross and the motto:

*"I can prove, beyond all doubt, that, for at least eight centuries (and if Jocelyn and Colgan are to be relied on, even up to the time of St. Patrick, by whom they record it to have been given – vide Sext. Vit. S. P. per f. Jocel., cap. cxxxviii; and Sept. Vit. S. P., cap. xvc), the cross, to which our motto plainly refers, was the only badge or arms known to the race of Conall. Their bards attest it in poems still extant."*

A derived version of these purely cruciform arms, without the “Scottish” element of the upholding arm embowed, and thus exactly as C.J. O’Donel described as “the only arms known to the race of Conal” could be more inclusively considered as “clan arms” for the *Cenel Chonaill*, i.e. the wider kinship group of all Conall’s descendants, and not just the O’Donnells

In addition, not only do the arms of O’Donnell of Ardfert serve to differentiate the arms from previous continental pretenders to the Earldom of Tyrconnell, and the vaunted touristic assumed clan version, but also from any resemblance to the arms of the Montegrin town of Perast, which are uncannily similar to the popular O’Donnell arms, with a red passion cross in a gold field, but borne by *two* arms.



Arms of the Town of Perast, Montenegro, today  
These arms also share the motto “In Hoc Signo Vinces”



Arms of the Town of Perast in Montenegro, and its twelve principal noble houses during the sovereignty of the Serenissime Republic of Venice.

Instead, this armiger’s *crest* consists of *two arms vambraced and embowed in pale the hands proper holding aloft the cross crosslet*, again rather like the Eucharistic host or monstrance to behold and venerate, and with repeated allusion from the motto. The use of an arm with armor indicates superior deeds and achievement. The helmet is a full-faced baronet/knight’s helm. The crest rests on a *chapeau de maintenance*, a cap of dignity, traditionally reserved for lords, peers, and originally dukes, and in this case also “*on account of diplomatic status*” given accredited ambassadorial status, the armiger being addressed by courtesy title of *Excellency*, in the patents for these arms, and supporters. The chapeau is *azure turned up ermined of the first*. In feudal heraldry, an azure chapeau is appropriate for the heirs of ancient baronial families who are no longer owners of the estates, as with Fingal, now held *in gross* (a county, since 1994).

The origin of the chapeau or cap lies in its being an emblem of civil authority, as distinct from military, which would be represented by a sword. The Pope bestowed such emblems on monarchs that they might be worn and carried before their parliaments, as symbols of the King’s power, and for the defence of the faith.

The Pope had sent such emblems described as the “*Cap and Sword of Maintenance*” to King Henry VIII, with the title “*Christianissimus*”, evidently of course before Henry broke with the Roman Church. Henry received these with great pomp in St. Paul’s Church, from the Pope’s Prothonotary on 19 May 1513. On that occasion, the cap was carried by the Duke of Buckingham, and the sword was carried by the Earl of Arundel. With time, the hereditary right to bear the cap before the King became vested in the Marquess of Winchester, or Duke of Bolton, who sometimes delegated this service to noblemen who acted as their deputies. The sword became disused, although other swords of State are used in Coronations, such as the *Curtana* or Sword of Mercy,

which is borne sometimes by the Lord High Steward of Ireland or his deputy.

In the current case of this armiger, from the shield could hang, although not illustrated, four corresponding pendant knightly insignia, respectively reflecting his status (order of precedence of each Order) as a papal Knight Commander with silver Star of the Pontifical Equestrian Order of Saint Gregory the Great; a Knight and Ambassador of the nobiliary Sovereign Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes, and of Malta (SMOM); a Knight Commander of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre; and a Knight Commander of Merit with Star of the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of Saint George, whose motto is also *In Hoc Signo Vincas*. The armiger also holds two Grand Crosses, including of the Sovereign Order's *Pro Merito Melitense*.

Also pendant could hang a representation of two pilgrimages, the Lourdes Pilgrimage Medal of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, and the Silver Cross of Honor of Jerusalem, with which the armiger was decorated by the *Custodia Franciscalis Terrae Sanctae*, having at one time lived in the Holy Land, and as a recurrent pilgrim. Its positioning could reflect the centrality of Jerusalem, where he thus once lived and was schooled, and of his Franciscan patronymity, reflecting also the long association between the Franciscans and the O'Donnells, both historically, and in his own family.

The Jerusalem Cross was also the emblem of the Crusader Kings of Jerusalem, such as this armiger's believed ancestor Fulques V d'Anjou, King of Jerusalem *ex jure uxoris* in 1141, from whom, through the Plantagenet and Stuart Kings, the principal O'Donnells also descend by a female ancestor.

It is also the symbol of the restored former Cistercian Abbey of the Holy Cross in Thurles, County Tipperary, where a relic of the True Cross is held, venerated by direct patrilineal ancestor Donal Oge O'Donnell

and the latter's uncle, Prince Red Hugh O'Donnell, on 30 November 1601 just before the latter deployed his first nephew Donal Oge O'Donnell, in support of Lord Fitzmaurice, 18<sup>th</sup> Baron of Kerry and Lixnaw, and where he remained as *custos* of Ardfert (the High Place of Miracles).

It is noteworthy in this connection that two lines of descent from the O'Donnell dynasty of Tyrconnell are combined in the present armiger: on the one hand through his father, and the O'Donnells of Ardfert, from a line collateral to that of Prince Red Hugh, who deployed his ancestor to Ardfert in 1601, namely his nephew Donal Oge O'Donnell, son of Donal O'Donnell, Sheriff of Donegal, ostensible Tanist and Seneschal of Tyrconnell, and elder half-brother of Red Hugh, both being sons of Sir Aodh Dubh Mac Manus O'Donnell, The O'Donnell, King of Tyrconnell; and on the other hand through his mother, from a line from Glenties, and directly related to the *Prince of the Church*, His Eminence the late Patrick Cardinal O'Donnell (1856-1927) who derived from the O'Donnells of Ramelton, akin to those of Glashagh..

Through Donal Oge's maternal grandmother, Lady Agnes Campbell, widow of James MacDonnell, Lord of Dunyvaig and formerly of the Isles, who later married Turlough Luineach O'Neill, this line also descended from the Stuart Kings of Scotland, and thus also from the Kings of Aragon, England, France, Hungary, and the Grand Princes of Serbia, Kiev-Rus, Russia, and others including the Emperor Constantine the Great, and thereby from Roman imperial families.

In this way, the armiger is also a descendant of Robert Bruce King of Scotland; St. Margaret Queen of Scotland and from Hungary, who brought the Holy Rood (a relic of the True Cross) to Scotland; John, King of England and Lord of Ireland and his widow, Isabelle of Angoulême who subsequently brought a relic of the Holy Rood to Holy Cross Abbey in Ireland;

Fulques V d'Anjou, King of Jerusalem; and of the Emperor Constantine, and his mother St. Helena, who discovered the relic of the True Cross or Holy Rood. Hence, the choice of arms, crest and motto, representing a continuity of the Constantinian inspiration, reflects an ancient historic family devotion to the Cross, exemplified by recurrent circumstances of veneration and service to the faith, justice and peace, including in Ireland, in the Holy Land, and in the world.

Lastly it can be noted that the badge takes the sword previously an element of the crest of the Earl of Tyrconnell, and instead lays it *in saltire*, overlaid by an olive branch. This device *in saltire* pays homage to the cross of Saint Patrick, and to the legacy of his namesake, the armiger's father, and portrays the superiority of peacemaking over warfare, as the most honorable vocation of the military tradition, and the ethos of this family's contemporary global engagement, exemplified over three modern generations. It is very much in the tradition of the biblical injunction of the prophet Isaiah 2:3-4:

*They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*

and also in the peace mission of Saint Francis in the Holy Land, as well as in the teleology of the United Nations. In this vein, Pope Paul VI in his historic address to the UN on the Feast of St. Francis, 4 October, 1965, invoked celebration as an epilogue of a laborious pilgrimage in search of a dialogue with the whole world, since the day when Christians were commanded:

*Go forth and bring good news to all the nations.*

And he said to the General Assembly,

*But it is you who represent all the nations!*

In this way, his address was a culmination of two thousand years of evangelical effort, and he knew it very well. He observed:

*This Organisation represents the obligatory path for modern civilization and world peace.*

*The people of the world turn to the United Nations as towards the ultimate hope for concord and peace.*

*The edifice which you are constructing must never fall into ruin, it must be perfected and adapted to the imperatives that the [future] history of the world will present.*

He spoke of the equality of nations, and that no country should be superior to the others.

Most importantly he said:

*It is impossible to be brothers if one is not humble. Because it is pride, as inevitable as it seems, which provokes tensions and struggles of prestige, dominance, colonialism, egoism: it is that which ruptures fraternity.*

In this, he served a solemn warning against a new imperialism, and the arrogance of superpower ambitions, ever relevant today.

This is therefore our *intangible cultural heritage*, and an earnest vocation.

