

# *The O'Donnell*

## CLAN REVIVAL

FRANCIS M. O'DONNELL

After more than three centuries in abeyance, the O'Donnell Clan was revived in 1954. To foster this, an "O'Donnell Clan Association" has been created in Ireland three successive times: 1954, 1989, and most recently in 1997. The following is a brief history of the Clan revival and the successive efforts at organization and preservation of its heritage since, from the perspective of one participating family.

There is a need to distinguish however between the Clan as a historical entity and a political community, and any association or society established on a national basis as a corporate entity. Whilst each clan is self-governing, the governance of its clan associations or societies in Ireland, if established as non-profit charities, must now conform the requirements of the Charity Regulator, with their statutes/ constitutions brought in line accordingly, and with appropriate transparency and accountability to subscribed membership. Nowadays, such clan associations or societies have various ways of internally recognising, appointing, or electing temporarily or for life, their leaders, be they "chiefs", presidents, chairpersons, or designating hereditary patrons. Some clan associations have both patrons or chiefs, and presidents or chairpersons.

My late father, Patrick Denis O'Donnell (1922-2005), participated in the first modern reunion of the O'Donnell Clan at its Rally in Donegal in Easter 1954, within weeks of my birth. On that occasion, a new "Chief of the Name" was inaugurated in the re-enacted manner of a traditional Clan Chieftain, namely John O'Donel of Larkfield who had been so gazetted in *Iris Oifigiúil* on 11 September 1945, following a determination of his genealogical seniority by the Chief Herald of Ireland. The Rally itself was described in detail in an article by C. A. Celkin in the *Donegal Annual*, Vol. II, no.3 of 1954.

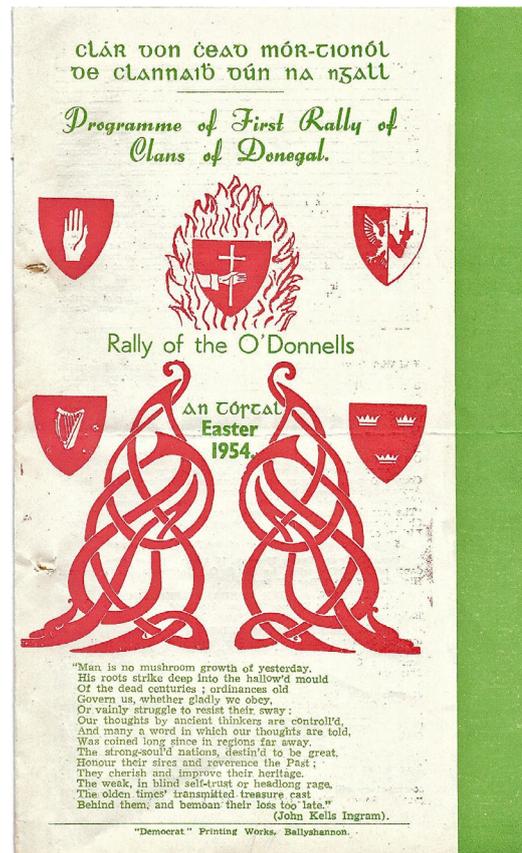
From then on, my father maintained occasional correspondence with the elders, the late Count Gabriel O'Donell von Tyrconnel, and Leopoldo O'Donnell, Duke of Tetuan, respectively of the branches in Austria and Spain, as well

as with other O'Donnells at home and in the diaspora. Leopoldo's son, Hugo (then Count of Lucena, now Duke of Tetuan) visited us in Glasnevin during his teens in 1963, and they developed a good relationship over the decades that followed, having both led military careers, albeit Hugo was almost a generation younger. My father wrote on Irish military history topics and Hugo is a distinguished naval historian in Spain. My father also had a long and mutually informative correspondence with the late Rupert O Cochlainn who became a great genealogist of the various branches of the O'Donnells of Tyrconnell, and whose archive in Lifford deserves a very special effort at preservation and digitalization. I have used it extensively in my own research.

That bond of kinship remains today between myself and Gabriel's son, Douglas, as well as with Hugo and other members of their families. I mention Douglas and Hugo in particular because between the three of us we have long-established and shared interests in the clan history of military, émigré, Wild Geese, and other O'Donnell sagas. We share a certain degree of knowledge, enjoy each other's company when we can, and have been strongly supportive of the efforts over the decades to cultivate a solid sense of O'Donnell heritage globally. My own intermittent correspondence with them goes back over 40 years, most of my adult life.

We are by no means the only ones to do so. The late Vincent O'Donnell (1945-2021) who sadly passed away on 19 June 2021, had played a pivotal role in this, perhaps

from the perspective of Clan Association and its ancestral heartland in Donegal, the most central one, the driving force, guide, and mentor of the O'Donnell Clan in its consecutive associations over the more recent decades. In this, he has had the full and unequivocal support of our families, and many others at home and abroad.



*The front cover of the original brochure for An Tóstal's Programme of the Rally of the Clans in Donegal, giving prominence to the O'Donnell Clan, at Easter, 1954.  
(Source: Author's collection)*

The first O'Donnell Clan Association was created in 1954 for the Rally of the O'Donnells, billed as the premier Rally of the Clans, under An Tóstal in Easter 1954. The brochure for the event gave detailed guidance, in 6 principal points, on what such a Clan Association should

be. It should have a Taoiseach recognized by the Chief Herald of Ireland as direct descendant of the last chieftains to rule; a Tanaisteach; a Seancha, Registrar and Archivist; a Seanascal Biadhtaidheacht, Treasurer and Almoner. Reunions were to be annual, with lectures, exhibitions and tours.

Outside of Ireland itself, it was the Count O'Donnell, recognized in France as chief of the name and of the arms, who presided over the annual gathering of the Wild Geese, the "men who preferred exile to dishonour", with a gala dinner in Paris under the Arms of Ireland (the gilded harp on an azure shield) and in whose honour the Viscount O'Neill recited his version of O'Donnell Abú in 1864. His ancestors went into military service under French royal commissions from Louis XIV, in advance of the Jacobite exodus that followed the Treaty of Limerick. That branch of O'Donnell counts in France went extinct in 1879.

Some decades later, O'Donnell clan diaspora gatherings were organized, some by Elliott O'Donnell, an author of ghost stories and great grandson of John O'Donnell of Baltimore, USA (of a branch from Limerick, whose Tyrconnell origins are disputed), some of whose descendants also married into French aristocracy. Gatherings of the O'Donnells in 1931 in London, and 1934 in New York, came under the auspices of the American-Irish Historical Society. They came in the bandwagon of earlier efforts of the Irish nationalist leadership to foster foreign support for independence through various "Irish Race" Conventions

and Congresses originally in the late nineteenth century and later respectively in Philadelphia (1919), Buenos Aires (1921), and Paris (1922). The latter was honorifically presided over by Don Juan O'Donnell, 3rd Duke of Tetuan, a direct descendant of Tyrconnell's ruling clan, and whose son, the 4th Duke, was briefly considered by Éamon de Valera as prime candidate for prospective restoration of an Irish monarchy. Although not yet named a republic, the 1937 constitution, Bunreacht na hÉireann, in which my grand-uncle, Maurice G. Moynihan, was much involved, took Ireland in a direction more in keeping with the egalitarian spirit of the 1916 proclamation.

Returning to the 1954 revival, members of the O'Donnell Clan reunion in Donegal back then were to use a Clan Badge, designed by the Chief Herald, with a suitable ribbon attached to it. A brat or cloak was to be designed for ceremonial occasions. Associate membership was to be open to different septs descending from the main stem, and to those maternally descended from an O'Donnell stem. The Registrar/Archivist of the Clan was to periodically furnish the National Library of Ireland with a detailed account of all genealogical and biographical data. As things turned out, a clan badge was devised by Gerald Slevin, but in his personal and not official capacity, and it was never registered officially by his Office of the Chief Herald.

Those were the expectations in 1954, but seemed to have fizzled out, although Leopoldo O'Donnell, 6th Duke of Tetuan, visited Ireland several times and

was conferred a doctorate of law, *honoris causa* in 1956 by Éamon de Valera as Chancellor of the National University of Ireland. Nonetheless, my father also kept in touch with the Austrian and Spanish branches, and hosted a brief visit to our home Dublin in 1963 by Leopoldo's son, the young Hugo O'Donnell, then Count of Lucena, and now the 7th Duke himself.

Fr. Hugh Ambrose O'Donel, OFM (b. 1940; who also uses the version 'O'Donnell') succeeded to his late father, John, upon the demise of the latter in 1971, and became the nominal Chief. He served on Franciscan missions in Africa, and is now retired in Dún Mhuire, Killiney. It was Fr. Hugh's father, John, who had prompted Rupert O Cochlainn (married to an O'Donnell lady) to undertake lifelong genealogical research. Rupert had also helped Alfonso O'Donnell-Lara of Spain find accommodation for his two sons, Alvaro and Patrick for a month-long summer visit in 1972. Fr. Hugh being a missionary, did not involve himself with the Clan, his sister Nuala has been a staunch and honoured participant. However, following advice of the Attorney General, in 2003, that "there is not, and never was, any statutory or legal basis for the practice of granting courtesy recognition as chief of the name", the Chief Herald discontinued the practice of recognising 'Chiefs of the Name.'

A second Clan Gathering was held again in Donegal in 1980, attended by Leopoldo, Duke of Tetuan, amongst others, and at which the young Vincent O'Donnell led the procession playing his bagpipes. A third Clan Gathering was

held in 1982, following which some felt a periodical should be produced. With that in mind a small committee was formed of persons in Donegal, with Vincent O'Donnell as Secretary. My father represented the Defence Forces and the Military History Society of Ireland at a special award ceremony for Rupert O Cochlainn in September 1983. Count Gabriel O'Donnell von Tyrconnell and his young son Douglas also attended, as did the young primary school teacher, Vincent O'Donnell. "O Domhnaill Abu – O'Donnell Clan Newsletter No. 1" first appeared dated December 1984. Shortly after the launch of the newsletter, my father became a subscriber (no. 17), and I joined (no. 121) a little later. Thus were we listed in the "mailing list" in newsletter no. 13, Spring 1990. Additional names were enumerated as "New Members" in newsletters nos. 14 of Summer 1990, 22 of Autumn 1994, and 16 of Summer 1991 and in later issues.

Another, fourth, Clan Gathering was announced on 22 March 1989, under the rubric Cruinniú Chlann Dálaigh – O'Donnell Clan Gathering. It was held on 17-19 June 1989 in Donegal, and also attended by the Austrian Count Gabriel and Spanish Count Hugo, as well as Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill of the Larkfield Branch, sister of Fr. Hugh, other kin and the Spanish and Austrian ambassadors. At this juncture, a new second iteration of an "O'Donnell Clan Association" was formed, with Vincent O'Donnell as Chairman. He also launched a compilation of articles to date under the title Clann Dálaigh, a souvenir issue that would be

revised and expanded as O'Donnells of Tir Chonaill, and later O'Donnells of Tyrconnell in years that followed. Count Hugo sent his children Carlos and Maria to Athlone during that summer, and Count Gabriel with his son Duxi were guests at the annual dinner of the Military History Society of Ireland in November 1989 in Dublin. Gabriel's daughter, Elisabeth, studied at Loreto Abbey in Dalkey, as did my son Konstantin briefly as a young child years later.

In March 1991, an Annual General Meeting of the O'Donnell Clan Association was held in Ballybofey. Plans were made for a Clan Center, and a fifth Clan Gathering in 1992, which was held in Donegal in mid-June, again with participants from branches of the O'Donnell clan, of Larkfield and Austria and beyond. Clearly Vincent felt a need to move beyond that nature of the "Clan" and some years later formed the third iteration, namely Cumann Chlann Dálaigh – O'Donnell Clan Association on 17 February in 1997. Vincent went online with his O'Donnell clan website, reporting a ten-fold increase in communications mostly from the USA. Newsletter no. 26 of Spring 1998 reported on an AGM of this (third) O'Donnell Clan Association held on 17 February 1998 in Letterkenny, with Vincent as Secretary. He launched a revision of his book at an annual (3rd) Clan Association dinner honoring local sportsman Henry O'Donnell.

The next, sixth, Clan Gathering was in Donegal in August of 1999, and included a re-enactment of the Battle of the Curlews. The opening speech was

given by Justice Dermot Kinlen (1930-2007), who had added O'Donnell to his name, in commemoration of his maternal grandfather, Thomas O'Donnell (1871-1943) who was a gaeilgeoir M.P. for West Kerry in Westminster and a prominent agrarian reformer, supported by other Kerry O'Donnells, including my late grandfather, Denis, and great grand-uncle, Maurice Moynihan, whose son, also Maurice, and Justice Kinlen, were also papal knights of Saint Gregory the Great. This was followed by an O'Donnell presence in Kinsale, County Cork, at the 400th anniversary in 2001 of the Battle of Kinsale, attended by Hugo O'Donnell, Count of Lucena, from Spain, and a seventh Clan Gathering in Valladolid in Spain in September 2002, commemorating the death of Red Hugh O'Donnell in 1602.

Vincent and I corresponded infrequently during the 1990s after my return to Europe in 1988 from Africa where I had been since 1976, and later when I lived variously in Geneva, Ankara, and New York. Newsletter no. 32 of Summer 2004 included my brief essay on Wealth of Dignity, Poverty of Destiny – The Destitution of a Catholic Princess for her Devotion, the tragic story of Mary Princess of Tyrconnell. The next newsletter, no. 33 of Spring 2005, sadly carried the obituary of my late father, Patrick Denis O'Donnell, on the same page as that of the late Don Leopoldo O'Donnell, Duke of Tetuan. Later in the year, the eighth O'Donnell Clan Gathering was held in Donegal, and for which I had arranged a supply of Tyrconnell whiskey miniatures, bespoke-

labelled for the Clan Gathering. The year also included a visit by the graduating class of the Maria Theresian Military Academy from Austria, who had taken the name “Jahrgang O’Donnell” in honour of Karl O’Donnell, Graf von Tyrconnell (1715–1771), hosted by the Irish Army, and with commemorative events organized by the Clan Association, and the participation of Major Douglas, Count O’Donnell von Tyrconnell.

Two years passed before the next newsletter, no. 35 of Winter 2007, which described the commemorative Clan Association journey (in effect, the ninth Clan Gathering) retracing the Flight of the Earls on its 400th anniversary, focused on events in Donegal and Rathmullan. It included the unveiling of the bronze statue of Red Hugh the First (Aodh Ruadh Ua Domhnaill; d. 1505), founder of Donegal Town and builder of its Castle, an initiative that Vincent had advanced.

In March 2008, another Clan Association excursion (a tenth Clan Gathering) was organized, this time through that part of Switzerland that the fugitive Earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnell had travelled in 1608 on their way to Rome. I was happy to join along in Lugano as we travelled by boat on Lake Lucerne from Brunnen to Fluelen and marched over the Teufelsbruecke (Devil’s Bridge) in the snow. I was honoured to uphold the Irish national tri-colour flag at Vincent’s request. Onward then we plodded to Andermatt and Merlischachen. That excursion and a later one to Rome in September 2008 (an eleventh Clan Gathering; in which I could not participate) were duly reported on in

the last newsletter no. 36 of Summer 2009. In that newsletter, Vincent announced that after 25 years, he was terminating it and moving instead to his new website, later replaced by <https://clanodonnell.wordpress.com/>.

He also announced a Clan Visit to Austria for 2012 (the twelfth Clan Gathering). Having retired from the UN, I was by then living in Vienna, serving as the Ambassador of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta to Slovakia, but was delighted to help organize some events for the Clan visit. My friend and eventual successor as ambassador, the late Ottokarl Finsterwalder, whose wife Almerie Countess Spannocchi was herself of Austrian O’Donnell descent (from Count Moritz/Maurice O’Donnell) agreed to host a very generous reception for the Clan Association visitors in their home at Elsbethen, outside Salzburg. As a member of the Austro-Irish Society, I briefed its 42nd Annual General Meeting, and it was agreed that the AIS would host a *heuriger* evening of wine for the Clan visitors.

Archduke Radbot von Habsburg-Lothringen, who had visited me years before in Kyiv with his French wife and his nephew, Sigismund, Archduke of Austria and Grand Duke of Tuscany, also agreed to kindly meet the Clan visitors in Salzburg. I gifted a Tyrconnell Whiskey to him on our collective behalf. Over the years, he has been in close contact as we shared some common historical interests. He was fascinated by the O’Donnell saga, especially Count Maximilian O’Donnell’s saving the life of Emperor Franz Josef in 1853. Our kinsman, Count Douglas

O'Donnell von Tyrconnell also arranged a visit to the Kaiservilla in Bad Ischl, where we were met by yet another Archduke, Markus von Habsburg-Lothringen. Douglas presented him with another bottle of Tyrconnell whiskey, which I had brought for the occasion. Douglas later hosted us uphill at his home in Hochkreut, a former imperial hunting lodge where he maintains a herd of deer.

Through the Abbot, Most Rev. Johannes Jung, OSB, I also arranged our being received in the Schottenstift for a tour of its museum by Frau Landauer. We also hosted a reception for the visitors in St. Johann's Club in Vienna. Thanks to a suggestion to me made by another Archduke, Michael von Habsburg-Lothringen, a confrère in the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, Prof. Judge Josef Azizi, descendant of Joseph von Ettenreich (the other person involved in Maximilian O'Donnell's saving of Emperor Franz Josef) joined us and livened the chatter with his slightly alternative account of that event in 1853.

Apart from the excursions abroad, another (thirteenth) Clan Gathering was held in Donegal in 2013, which I attended along with my sister Nola and our young cousin Camilla from Tralee. I was also given a chance to speak about the progress of my research into Red Hugh's orphaned nephew, Donal Oge, and the O'Donnells of Ardfert, evidence of our Tyrconnell ancestry and our extinct branch of

O'Donnell counts in France. On one evening at that gathering, 8 August 2013, an "open forum" was held, with many proposals made for the future of the clan association.

A fourteenth Clan Gathering took place in Madrid in October 2017, including trips to Toledo, Alcazar, Salamanca, El Escorial, Valladolid, and Simancas. A reception was hosted by the Irish Ambassador, H.E. Síle Maguire (whose paternal grand mother was an O'Donnell from Letterkenny) at the Irish Ambassador's residence, graced also by the presence of Don Hugo O'Donnell, 7th Duke of Tetuan and his son Carlos O'Donnell, 15th Marquis of Altamira. I could not join the gathering, despite overlapping a little in Madrid, as I was presenting a paper on the subject of "Irish Nobility and Armigerous Families" at the 2nd International Colloquium on Nobility, hosted the Real Asociación de



*Amb. Francis O'Donnell in the centre with Don Hugo O'Donnell, the Duke of Tetuan, on the left and his son, Carlos O'Donnell, Marques of Altamira on the right, Madrid in 2017.  
(Source: Author's collection)*



*The late Vincent O'Donnell, Secretary and President-Emeritus of the O'Donnell Clan Association, in Salzburg on visit in 2012  
(Source: Author's Collection)*

Hidalgos de España on 21 October, but managed to connect again to Hugo and Carlos over dinner and met later his cousin, Dame Angelines O'Donnell, and her husband, Quentin Roy Olson.

Nonetheless, apart from periodic Clan Gatherings and the newsletter, there were many other initiatives over the years that Vincent and various members of the committee were engaged in: annual 'Clan' dinners in Donegal, the renovation of Donegal Castle, the Flight of the Earls Heritage Center in Rathmullan, and another at the Old Courthouse in Lifford, where Rupert O Cochlainn's genealogical archive on the O'Donnells is preserved. Vincent also represented the O'Donnell Clan Association at local funerals and at many foreign events, from unveiling of plaques in Spain, to weddings in Austria. His reports on these are testimony to his broad influence and admiration by many in the O'Donnell diaspora across the globe.

Over the years, Vincent and I exchanged much correspondence not only on my own research and various queries he could respond to, but also on the matters for which he requested my advice and involvement, such as on the "Clan Badge", and the "Clan Arms", and eventually on the revision of the Constitution of the Clan Association of 1997, to bring it in line with the new requirements of the Charity Regulator in Ireland. This also involved consultations with several members in Ireland and abroad, including Austria, Canada, Britain, Lithuania, New Zealand, Spain and USA. I was approached by Clans of Ireland to become involved in their work. Also representing the O'Donnell Clan, I joined the board of Clans of Ireland in September 2012, until 2015, when I became more active again in global policy debates.

Understandably, the COVID-19 pandemic obliged the cancellation of the 15th Clan Gathering planned for Donegal in September 2020. Vincent and I had planned the original dates to dovetail with a twinned event in Leuven, Belgium, that I was organizing with the Irish College there. This was deferred and held online by Zoom in October 2020, being the inaugural webinar of the Irish College in Leuven, under the theme "Memorialising Émigré Dignity", which can now be found on YouTube [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oz6uZz1U3jg>]. It marked the quatercentenary of the first burial in the Franciscans' Chapel of Saint Anthony's College, Leuven, that of Donal Oge O'Donnell, nephew of the famous Red Hugh O'Donnell, Prince of Tyrconnell,

and who left Ireland as part of the retinue of the Flight of the Earls in 1607. To mark this and honour the 250 Irish émigré friars, scholars, soldiers and friends interred or associated, the O'Donnell family and the Irish College Leuven with the support of the Leuven Centre for Irish Studies and the European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies, hosted the online webinar, which included presentations by renowned historians such as Dr. Katharine Simms, Prof. Fr. Micheál MacCraith, Prof. Johan Vanberckmoes, Baron Bernard Snoy et d'Oppuers, and by Count Douglas O'Donnell von Tyrconnell and myself.

I visited Vincent O'Donnell last on 24 January 2020 at his home in Donegal, and gave him copy of my two recent books. He explained to me the plight of his progressive medical condition, motor neurone disease, that diminished his mobility. He later received a papal decoration from the Bishop of Raphoe, Most Rev. Dr. Alan McGuckian, SJ, for his lifelong work for his parish church. By early March 2020 he had given up his role as clan association secretary and his membership of the association's ad hoc committee, announced on the Association's Facebook page. Many of us lauded his long service and pivotal role as clan secretary and organizer. He was not of course alone in his efforts in Donegal. Many others had served on the clan association committee over the decades, and some, like Vincent on 19 June 2021, have passed on to their eternal reward. We are grateful to all of them.

As with the passing of all great architects,

a legacy remains, and some nascent shoots require tending for a new season of growth. Many "lost" branches of the historic Clan have emerged from obscurity as a result of modern genealogical research. There is room and role for all. We need to convene again in person, safely but surely, once this pandemic abates, and reform our constitution of 1997 to render it fit for the years and challenges to come. There is huge energy out there in our diaspora, and great capacity to join forces with the historic core of dedicated kin in Donegal and Ireland. The O'Donnell Clan, like a growing caterpillar, has shed its outer skin several times, as the beauty of its growing maturity emerges from its incubatory chrysalis and takes flight, flourishing into a global community in the 21st century, much thanks to the efforts of the late Vincent O'Donnell (1945-2021), former Secretary and President Emeritus of the O'Donnell Clan Association, and the others who have gone before him, notably the late genealogist Rupert O Cochlainn, and the deceased heads of various branches, and other various past custodians of our heritage.

Over the past year, much excitement has been generated by new excavations in Valladolid in Spain, in the ostensible search for the lost remains of Red Hugh O'Donnell, who died there in 1602. Whilst it is doubtful that his identifiable remains can ever be found, given the nature and extent of the thorough destruction of the former Franciscan monastery where he was buried, the interest stirred has led to calls for erection of suitable statues in his memory, both in Valladolid and in Donegal. Indeed,

there may also be a case to undertake an archaeological investigation of the old Franciscan abbey in Donegal town itself, where his own ancestors and many other members of Gaelic royalty were buried. According to at least one writer, the late Fr. Charles Patrick Meehan (1812-1890), these O'Donnells were buried "in a vault constructed under the grand altar". Certainly, such a discovery, or at least the renovation of the old Abbey, would be worthwhile. We know that other members of that dynasty were buried in Franciscan crypts below sacristies/choirs, or in front of high altars, such as Red Hugh's brother Rory, the first Earl of Tyrconnell, in San Pietro in Montorio in Rome, their nephew Donal Oge O'Donnell, and others such as Nuala in St. Anthony's in Leuven. My own later ancestors were buried in a tomb constructed on the site of the old sacristy in Ardfert Cathedral, adjacent to its chapel of Lady Honora FitzMaurice. That O'Donnell tomb was moved in the 1980s to another location nearby, to facilitate the archaeological excavations of that Cathedral, the full renovation of which was envisaged in 1989, as an RTE archives video recalls, but never completed by OPW, to the probable chagrin also of the late Donegal-born Father Leonard Boyle (1923-1999), who was then prefect of the Vatican Library in Rome, and very supportive of the project, to address what he considered "the scandal of the neglected cathedral". It is an irony of Ireland's economic prowess, that despite the largesse of tax coffers in recent decades, such works of restoration have languished, whether in Ardfert, or indeed in Donegal Abbey, let alone Donegal Castle, the completion

of which could enable a proper center of studies and archives for the various ancient kings and clans of Tyrconnell.

As for the identification of Red Hugh's mortal remains, I am unaware of any forensic archaeological testing of DNA of clearly-identified O'Donnell ancestors dating back centuries. Not only are the remains of Red Hugh lost (so far), but so are those of his brother Rory, whose remains disappeared in Rome. So we have no DNA data to compare with at present. None of the principal surviving lineages of the historic O'Donnells of Tyrconnell have publicly disclosed their Y DNA "footprint", and some are reluctant to do so, even if they have indeed privately tested it. It is regarded as very personal identity information, like a signature, a fingerprint, a bank password, and its misuse could lead to various forms of identity theft - or upset family beliefs and indeed identity! The historic lineages are currently clear in their identity, and need no proof by DNA (unless in a court case where theoretical paternity or descent claims condition inheritance or title to property).

Further caveats: (a) as explained in my book's intro, there were several different O'Donnell family-name founders, not just the (principal) Donegal clan, some of whom later affiliated to the main one; (b) "non-paternity events" are not uncommon in the larger Irish clans, where a clan name was often also taken under fosterage, or desired affiliation, or where a child was fathered clandestinely; (c) a growing number of young male O'Donnells take their name from their mother; (d) identity as a cultural construct is transmitted

socially and not only by genetics; (e) when matrilineal ancestry is included, our ancestors “explode” numerically in such a way that we of Irish heritage can safely say not only are we all descended from all O’Donnells who lived 800 years ago, but also from all O’Neills, O’Connors, who left any surviving descendants today. If a distant ancestor is presumed and his Y-DNA known, a Y-DNA test can tell you if you are or not descended in the exclusively male line, but it cannot tell you that you are not descended from him e.g. through a female ancestor.

All that aside, published patrilineal test results can be found if you search for “O’Donnell Surname Project - FamilyTreeDNA”, and one will see that most O’Donnells are of the “R1b” haplogroup, the most common of men across the northern hemisphere (millions!), and which includes most men in Europe. A few are of the “I2” haplogroup, which is much older, and rarer. But see also the controversy behind Dr. Brian Lacy’s research, on whether or not the O’Donnells

of Tyrconnell are indeed part of the Cenel Chonail, or descend from the Ui Neill, for that matter. And the most recent common ancestor of the alleged descendants of Niall of the Nine Hostages, appears to go back 4,000 years, not the assumed 1,500.

Does it matter? For some, the sense of community is already enjoyed since the revival of the O’Donnell Clan back in 1954. Perhaps more important than bloodlines are the sense we make of that shared heritage, and indeed the extent to which we impute a sense of purpose, hearkening back to the legendary grant of arms on the shield of Conall by St. Patrick, and his borrowing of the conversion of the Emperor Constantine the Great, to uphold a high spiritual calling, upon which we build a shared future, inclusively. And that is why I wrote the Epilogue of my book in the vein I did, believing our vocation to be one of global service to humanity, the universalism inherent in our faith, and more essential than ever to our survival as a civilization and our sustainability as an ecosystem.

#### ABOUT FRANCIS M. O’DONNELL

Ambassador (ret.) Francis M. O’Donnell is the author of the book “The O’Donnells of Tyrconnell - A Hidden Legacy”, released in 2019 by Academia Press, Washington DC. His only other book “No Man’s Land – Selected Poetry and Art” was published in early 2020. A Knight of Malta, and former ambassador of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta to the Slovak Republic, he previously served as a United Nations official/representative for 32 years. He is presently a trustee/director of the School of Civic Education (UK), formerly established as the liberal School of Political Studies of Moscow, and which catalysed a multiplicity of similar schools across the former East Bloc, now under the auspices of the Council of Europe. He regularly contributes on multilateralism and governance reform to global think-tanks of presidents and prime ministers.



*Behind the author: Portrait of 10-year old Hugh Albert O’Donnell, 2nd Earl of Tyrconnell, 1615 . Reproduction of the original under license from the Trustees of Kiplin Hall in Yorkshire*