

## THE LANNINS: MY MOTHER'S CLAN IN WEST CORK

An Dr Liam SS Réamonn do sgríobh.

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**The Irish National School system**, which aimed at providing an elementary education for all Irish children, was established by the British Government in 1831. Pádraig Pearse rightly called the National Schools in Ireland 'The Murder Machine'. The word 'Ireland' or 'Irish' did not appear in the National School Curriculum. Pearse set up a school called St Enda's, which promoted Irish.



**Gleann School, West Cork**

After the Irish State was set up, National Schools embraced a very high standard of education. Above is a picture of Gleann School, in which pupils of every year sat in the one room. Shoes were worn in the vicinity of the school. Discipline was at times excessive. For her secondary education my dear mother, Mary, went on to the Presentation Convent, Bandon, which Catherine O'Neill from Skibbereen had founded, in 1829. My mother came first in Ireland, for Irish, in her Intermediate Certificate.

Her brother Seán, after a career in the British Merchant Navy and the BBC, returned to Ireland for one more time. He spoke Irish with me, one afternoon. He had never forgotten what he had learned, with such fluency, in Gleann. Her sister Mairéad retained the same skills. Another brother, George, became a National School Principal, an expert in native flora and fauna. Two others, Joseph and Francis, gathered accounts of local history. Francis is now a living link, at 90 years of age, with people who lived during the Famine.

High linguistic and other skills were once learned for the **Primary Certificate** (now discontinued). In Mayo, a man once told me that, in the National School in Béal an Mhuirthead, they had studied the use of the **Copula** in Irish, in the Subjunctive Mood - present and preterite (or past tense).

Copula (from the Latin) means 'connecting verb' and expresses the relation between a subject and predicate noun. In Irish, the **Copula**, in the simple form 'is', does not count as a real verb (though related to the German 'ist' and also to the Spanish *ser* and *estar*). Uses include:

- i) the coupling of a subject and a predicate noun (in classificatory and identificatory clauses) e.g.: *Is dochtúir é* (*He is a doctor*) or *Is é an dochtúir é* (*He is the doctor*) and
- ii) certain *adjective* uses eg modal verb-like uses (ie like uses with an auxiliary verb of necessity or possibility) - with prepositions *le, do etc*, e.g.: *Ba mhaith le Máire an carr* (*Máire would like the car*).

National School teachers knew about scholarship. <https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/5235093/5234958/5235348>  
<https://greener2.gitbooks.io/gramadach-gaeilge/content/an-briathar-the-verb/an-chopail.html> <http://nualeargais.ie/gnag/gram.htm>  
<http://www.nualeargais.ie/gnag/kopul4.htm> <https://www.daltai.com/discus/messages/13510/38247.html?1233770150>

### The Environment in which Lannin Families lived

**1] The colonised population** in Ireland was, by design, the most destitute in Europe. Usually, their only food was the potato, their only beverage water: a bed or a blanket a rare luxury. Absentee Landlords

lived in luxury in England, alien to their tenants in nationality, religion and often in language too. In 1842, their agents extracted high rents from the tyrannised - some £6m (£740m today). The German traveller Kohl noted the mansions of Absentee Landlords standing ‘stately, silent and empty’. Their beautiful estates were soon to follow suit:



**Rockisland, West Cork**

Any improvements wrought by a tenant on his plot resulted in a rent increase, so depriving him of incentive. A ‘Spailpín’ (landless labourer) had little regular work, except at potato-picking time. Unless he could grow potatoes somewhere, he and his family would have all but nothing, for thirty weeks of the year. Famine came in **1845**, when disease took the potato crop.

In Cork City, in one week in February **1947**, 49 residents died in the Workhouse of hunger and dysentery. All around, were hovels crowded with the sick and dying, with patches of dirty straw on an earthen floor, no furniture. The sight in doorways, of the dead and dying, and of ‘ragged spectres’ of people begging in the streets, shocked travellers. Public Works were ineffective in countering starvation in the worst areas.

A man called Denis McKennedy died while employed on public road-works, in Schull, West Cork. Not paid for 2 weeks, a post mortem examination showed no food in his stomach or small intestine. In his large intestine was undigested raw cabbage. His pay was 8d a day – making €12 per year. Not enough to feed a family. Such employment, in effect, was often a death sentence.

In **1846**, while religious and civil procedures were still carried out for the dead, a man was buried from **St Mary's (pre-Reformation) Church in Schull**. The priest surmised it unlikely, in his entire life, that the man had put £5 through his hands – ie less than £600 in today’s money. He had lived an insecure, destitute life, ever without any sense of hope.

**2]** **The potato crop** was destroyed by a dark fungus in **1845**. The potatoes themselves became mulchy, giving off a foul stench. About half of the crop failed. The British Prime Minister, Robert Peel, imported what was known as ‘Indian meal’ from North America, to be sold at discount prices to the poor. He repealed the ‘Corn Laws’, which prevented corn imports into Britain, so protecting English farmers.

In **1846**, the potato crop failed again - but much more severely. Mass starvation and death stalked the land, exacerbated by an unusually cold winter. Freezing temperatures and starvation, together with diseases like typhus and dysentery (referred to as ‘famine fever’), caused ever-mounting death rates amongst the malnourished and weakened people. **1847** (known as ‘**Black ‘47**’), marked the worst point of the Famine. Scarcely any potatoes were harvested for the second year in a row. Death, and evictions of tenants to make way for profitable cattle-grazing, soared.

**A branch of the Lannin family lived in Gleann, in West Cork, south of Mt Gabriel.** Their single-roomed bothán is shown below:

There was a father, a mother and a child. When their potatoes rotted in the ground, they had nothing to eat. However they may have sought sustenance from grass, nettles and seaweed, they will have only grown weaker. In the manner in which people then died, it is likely i) that, with all suffering severe pain, the mother and father witnessed their child expire, ii) that the mother saw her husband draw his final breath and iii) that she then lay down, racked with pain and despair, never again to rise.



Every day, around Schull, a man was tasked with taking dead bodies with his horse and cart, from houses, fields or the side of the road. He took the three Lannins from their bothán, in this way, to bring them for burial, with no coffin, or ceremony, in pits such as were later called Famine Graves. My grandfather, John, told me a man had been collected near his house, naked and with grass in his mouth. A lack of clothes came from sheer poverty. The name 'white monkeys' could be used for those still alive.

**3] Being evicted** originally meant that Bailiffs and the Sheriff, usually with a police or military escort, ejected tenants from their homes and then commonly burned or knocked them. When the Conservative **PM Robert Peel** was replaced by the Liberal **Sir John Russell**, after an election in 1847, matters worsened and 'crowbar brigades' and 'hut tumbler' took over evictions. The Liberals or 'Whigs' believed in 'laissez faire' or non-interference in a '**God-given**' free market. Russell and the Treasury official in charge of Famine Relief, **Charles Trevelyan** (an intense evangelical), are seen as being culpable for **mass deaths**. Trevelyan's integrity and energy masked two difficulties: he did not approve of the Irish and he was dogmatically devoted to the 'doctrine' of the free market. He did not like Peel, a lesser 'free-marketeer', who had tried to relieve suffering in Ireland and in Paisley, Scotland, in 1842.



**The period 1847-48** was when most of the mass evictions took place. Landlords took the opportunity to 'clear' their estates of unprofitable tenants, who could not pay rent, and to replace them in many cases with livestock. The Incumbered Estates legislation in 1849 saw evictions increase, carried out by the most savage '*Exterminators*', so named for their lethal treatment especially of women and young children.

I

**nGoibín, le m'Uncal Proinnsias, 90 Bliain d'Aois, a chuir síos ar an Stair seo dom. 9/2022.**

In all, over 70,000 evictions took place during the Famine, displacing up to 500,000 people, most of whom died of want, disease and cold. However, as the Constabulary was only required to record eviction statistics from 1849, and many people **were readmitted into holdings** as caretakers, there is no accurate figure of how many were permanently evicted.

**A second branch of the Lannin family lived in Goibín, in West Cork.** They were evicted onto the side of the road by their Landlord, George Becher. [William Becher was well known for evicting Catholics, renting less than 1/4 acre, during the Famine in the Skibbereen area.] They had always paid rent but dealing in livestock was becoming more profitable for Landlords. The changeover was not successful, in



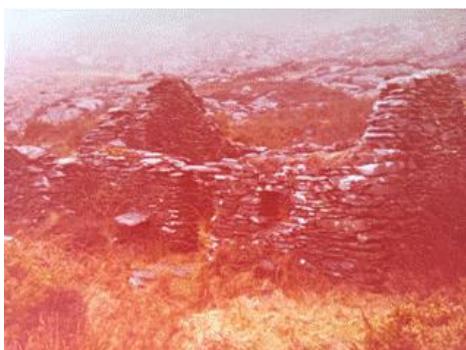
the remote area. The Lannins were so allowed back. This would likely have happened in 1849 to my great-grandfather, as a result of which our families live today.

Russel and Trevelyan were reluctant to either stop the export of food from Ireland or to control prices. They did neither but deployed troops to guard food being exported from Ireland.

Above is a picture of a storehouse in Dunmanway, West Cork, which would be filled with grain for export. Soldiers guarded it from the starving people, who would be shot on sight.

Spending on Famine Relief in Ireland, over six years, totalled £9.5 million (mostly spent before mid-1847). The British Government spent £69 million on fighting the Crimean War of 1853-1856. Famine victims often died unseen in mud huts or under hedges: only general estimates from officials and military personnel are available.

**4]** The potato blight or *Phytophthora infestans* is a fungus which attacks the potato plant leaving the potatoes inedible. It spread from North America to Europe in the 1840s. Ireland was the hardest hit.



**A third branch of the Lannin family came to live on Mt Gabriel, in West Cork, as the Famine horror receded, around 1865. There was a father, mother and two sons. They lived in the one-roomed bothán below:**

Their dwelling was at some distance from roads, in rocky terrain. The family were hardworking and owned two cows. These were grazed in stony patches, in which potatoes could not be cultivated. They were kept under constant watch and put into a byre at night.



Two West Cork Cows

The family's staple food was the potato. They drew water from a well in nearby rocks, which, my **Grandfather** (who was born just after the Famine), told me never ran dry. It was the one and only secure thing they had.



In the picture above, west of the bothán and up the mountain, can be seen the remains of what the English improperly called 'lazy beds'. These were hand-dug potato drills – two evenly-spaced parallel rows of potatoes – efficiently providing good yields of the crop. The field allocated by the Landlord is demarcated by stone walls. A protrusion of rock in the middle indicates the poor composition of the land.

My **Uncle Joseph** (nach maireann), from the Lannins in Goibín, befriended the two sons and helped them to emigrate to the US in **the early 1940s**. They made their way to Butte, Montana, established as a copper-mining camp in the **1860s**. It is said that they sent generous emigrants' remittances home. This may be why potato-farming ceased up Mt Gabriel and other activities pursued in its place.

By 1851, the population of Ireland had dropped to 6,552,385. In the absence of Famine, likely population growth would have resulted in just over 9m inhabitants. Based on this assumption, about 2.5m were lost during the Famine, with an estimated million having emigrated. By this count, 1.5m died from the effects of Famine. As those in remotest areas were not counted, **this figure could be as high as 2m**. Deaths were highest amongst children under five years of age and amongst the elderly.

**5] The English Corn Laws** protected grain prices for wealthy Tory landowners. In 1845, Sir Robert Peel knew already that importing maize would not solve the problem. With the need for importing corn for a particular emergency evident, however, he decided to abolish the Corn Laws over time. Available grain needed to enter the ports duty-free. He had to argue that, once removed, the duty could not be reimposed after the Famine. Robert Peel used the Irish crisis in 1846 to remove a duty many saw as unjustified.

In 1847, his Government was nonetheless voted out. Peel, by now seriously ill, had a powerful intellect and a conscience to which he answered. Much of the suffering from Famine in Ireland would have happened anyway, but under the English PM, Sir Robert Peel, **nobody died of starvation**. Peel imported 'Indian Maize' from the US, for Famine Relief. Bright yellow, it was called 'Peel's Brimstone'. At first driving the starving into panic (because of inedible food previously provided), the maize soon became popular. But £100,000 worth of meal could not replace £3.5m worth of potatoes.

Inadequate as it was, maize distribution was inhibited by Trevelyan's 'laissez faire' insistence on keeping the grain in storage until the prices of other staple foods rose to make them unattainable and the people left at death's door. This wrongly assumed that Ireland had a functioning market economy, indicating a pathetic knowledge of economics and perverted Christianity. Relief Committees arranged grain storage in areas such as Rockisland, in West Cork.

The English Landlord, **George Notter**, owned the land in Rockisland. He had grain in storage but was using it as animal feed. A story goes that a starving woman, the last alive in her household, dragged herself along the ditch over two days, to the Notter residence, to beg for food. She was refused and turned away. As she left, she came across a feeding trough for turkeys, filled with Relief Grain. She swallowed some mouthfuls.

The woman was reported to Notter, who went at her with a riding whip, **calling for his hunting dogs**. She struggled to depart the property, returning to her bothán and the remains of her deceased family. She did not come out again.

<https://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/famine/after.htm> <https://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/famine/after.htm>  
<https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-20470367.html> <https://www.failteromhat.com/southernstar/page10.php>  
<http://rpradcliffe.com/2469.htm>  
<https://books.google.ie/books?id=vm5GDgAAQBAJ&pg=PT315&dq=peels+brimstone+definition&hl=ga&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjHp87vqML6AhURkFwKHXhDAuYQ6AF6BAgFEAE#v=onepage&q=peels%20brimstone%20definition&f=false>  
 Famine in West Cork, Patrick Hickey, Mercier Press, 2002

## **IRISH SURNAMES: GENERAL INTRODUCTION - THE LANNINS OF SCHULL**

Completed on 20/Márta/2014, on the 96th Birthday of Máire Ní Lainín's (my Mother).

Most Irish family names are today given in an anglicized form, sometimes having a number of versions. The original names have meanings and history which stretch back to the tenth century. They are oldest family names in Europe.

Anglicisation of Gaelic clans and of their names began in earnest in the 1600s, during the submergence of Gaelic, Catholic Ireland. Defeated Irish chieftains left for Europe and English landowners took over increasing stretches of territory throughout the country.

The operation of English law, during the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, provides records of name forms of Irish people over the 1500s. Information on first names and surnames improved in the 1600s, as English law became more entrenched. With edicts, such as Elizabeth's "everywhere you see a bard, hang him", the availability of resources for preparing manuscripts in Irish diminished. The Tudor, Cromwellian and Williamite conquests were effective against a civilization of smaller size – without a steel industry. Maps of sixteenth and seventeenth century Ireland rendered key Irish family names and territories in English. The renaming of people and of landscapes was underway.

Deeper anglicisation, at the very core of Irish society, spread during the Great Famine in the mid-1800s. Where the position of a clan was most undermined, acculturation was most severe. Even the hallowed Ó (Ní) or Mac (Nic), which call to mind our forbears, was dropped from surnames. Tradition has it that relinquishment of the Ó or Mac, at the core of our Gaelic identity, was the price for being admitted to a public soup kitchen. The provision of soup kitchens and minor relief works was ineffective.

The remaining Irish lords and small farmers (termed peasants, tenant-farmers or tenants-at-will by the English) switched cultural allegiance. Their survival demanded it: to their foreign rulers (the Nua-Ghail) they were more acceptable if they spoke and acted like them. Anglo-Irish culture is comparable with provincial English culture. Gaelic culture, of unmixed Indo-European origins, is utterly different. By the early 1700s, English culture and laws had become dominant. Noble lineage had been a mainstay in Irish societal structures. A diversification of surname forms followed the shattering of surname structures.

## **2] RESUMPTION OF THE 'Ó' AND 'MAC'**

In 1890 only 14% of the MacCarthy name was rendered in the anglicised 'Carthy/Cartie' forms. A general regaelicisation of surnames, with the growing use of the 'Ó' and 'Mac' forms, underscored anew the persistent Irish identity in Cork and elsewhere. Notably, the resurgence occurred not long after the worst ravages of the Great Famine.

For all the deconstruction of the social and historic implications of Irish family names, when a person is nowadays introduced to another, the comment on his/her surname: “that’s a good name” may still be heard, a remnant of the more meaningful interactions of yesteryear.

### 3.1] RANDOM CHOICE OF FIRST NAMES

First names given according to traditional practices connect the individual to other members of his/her family and clan (even where formal clan structures have ceased to be). The names so used generally have meanings and associations intended i) to hold up some ideal for the person so named and ii) to honour an elder member in the family.

In recent decades, more or less fashionable new names – from the world of television, football and popular music etc. – are given, with no particular relevance or meaning. First names chosen in this way show a weakening of the nuclear family bonds. The use of some first names, sourced eg from the international media, sits uneasily even with anglicized Irish surnames. Names which reflect passing fashion now often replace those which celebrate the many generations of a family.

### 3.2] DO NAMES MATTER?

Strong cultures uphold family and personal strengths, inter alia. Such cultures adopt, widely enough, identifiable first- and second-name nomenclatures. In the digital age, cultures have less immediate relevance. A consequent loss of an identity and of cultural inheritance more characterizes populations in the growing mega-cities. Such effects are unlikely widely to be debated.

## 4] THE LANNINS OF SCHULL: ANCESTRY

In 1923, **Rev. Patrick Woulfe** published the following information, summarised hereunder.

Co. Cork: Ó Lonáin – anglicised to O’Lonane, O’Lonan, O’Lonnán, O’Lannan, O’Lennane (with severe anglicisation to Lenane, Lannan, Lannin, Lennon, Leonard etc.). The name means ‘descendant of Lonán’ (a diminutive of lon, blackbird) and was borne by a Cork family, from Rosscarbery. They were followers of the O’Learys in Cork, where the name appears to have been pronounced Ó Lionáin. There was also a Wicklow branch.

Cos. Fermanagh, Mayo and Galway: Ó Leannáin – anglicised to O’Lennane, O’Lennan (severe anglicisation to Lannan, Lannen, Lannon, Lennon, and Leonard. The name means ‘descendant of Leannán’ (diminutive of leann, a cloak or mantle) and was borne by at least three distinct families, in counties of Fermanagh, Mayo and Galway. The O’Leannáins of Fermanagh were erenaghs of Lisgoole [mentioned in M1445 of Pt 8 of the Annals of the Four Masters.]. Those of Mayo are a branch of the Ui Fiachrach and they lived near Killala. The Galway family were followers of O’Kelly of Ui Maine.

Edward MacLysaght says that Ó Leannáin was used as a synonym of Ó Luinín. He does not avert, however, to the different meanings of these names. He goes on to ascribe the derived names (O) Lennon and Lenan to septs in Cork, Fermanagh and Galway, where he infers that the innumerable other forms of these names recorded cannot be identified as adhering to a particular clan.

The commercial website 4Crests.com puts the Ó Leannáin clan in Cork, saying (incorrectly) that Ó Lonáin and Ó Luinín are other spellings of the same name. The Parish of Clooney in Co. of Clare (bounded by the Parish of Kilfenora) is said to contain Tobar Lonáin – indicating that a saint once bore the name. The commercial website Ancestry.com records that the Annals of the Four Masters refer to Ó Leannáin (Lennan) six times. Other records, from later times, are quoted – and they put this family in several places.

On the website users.skynet.be/ken.lennan, a description: “the shield argent, on a mount in base vert, a buck browsing proper”, is given of the Coat of Arms of the Ó Leannáin (Lennan) clan of Fermanagh, Mayo and Galway. The family motto is Prisco Stirpe Hibernico (of ancient Irish stock).

*Commercial vendors have varied the Ó Leannáin heraldic description to provide Coats of Arms, of dubious validity, for the many variants of Lennon, correct or supposed. Not every clan had a coat of arms or can show record of one, even if it did. The Ó Leannáin clan certainly had the position to warrant gaining a coat of arms from the Crown. The Ó Lonáin clan did not have a leadership role: they were skilled in crafts, providing services (such as sword-making) to the powerful Ó Laoghaire clan. No Ó Lonáin coat of arms has survived.*

On irishgathering.ie/clan, a commercial website, it says the name O’Lennon is yet to be researched – but gives the coat of arms anyway.

Most tenants were ‘tenants-at-will’, which meant that the landlord could evict them at any time. Some had a lease, for the life of the father and the eldest son, and so they were relatively safe from eviction (as long as they could pay the rent). The potato formed the main part of their diet. Herring, oatmeal, and milk (if they had a goat or cow) were occasional supplements.

## **5] HOW THE LANNINS OF SCHULL LIVED**

The Lannins, from the late 1600’s to the early 1700s, were tenant farmers in the Schull and Skibbereen areas of West Cork. There are two major spelling variants. Lannins around Schull were Roman Catholic and Lannans, around Skibbereen, were Church of Ireland. With the changing fortunes of Protestants and Catholics in England, it was known for some Irish clans to have a foot in both camps. Depending upon who was in power in England, in the time of Protestant ascendancy, one side of a clan would affect to protect the other.

The tenant farmers’ lot was hard: they lived at the mercy of their Protestant landlord or (if he lived in England) of an agent. They lived in one-roomed botháns, with just holes in the roof or with chimneys of wicker-work, plastered over with mud. The walls consisted of mud or sods of grass. Windows were open to the elements all year round.

A pig was a most valuable possession and was kept in the house, to be sold for cash, at the local market. The main items in the house were a potato pot and a water bucket. Mothers, fathers, children and grandparents all lived in the one room. They would sleep on the floor on rushes or straw.

<https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/5235093/5234958/5235348>

Collected by Joseph Lannin (of Gubbeen) now in 53  
 the Dept. of Lands, Dublin - 51

## Local Landlords.

The first landlord of Gubbeen who lived about one hundred years ago, was Mr. Hickson, a native of Kerry. He was a very wicked man. He made his tenants pay extremely high rents. A farm containing only fifteen acres of poor land had a rent of ten pounds yearly, in Hickson's time, and its present rent is only twenty-six shillings.

No tenant would be allowed admittance to his office in Bantry, when they came to pay the rent, for he was afraid of being shot. The rent had to be put into the letter-box. He then sold the land to Colonel Longfield Gubbeen and Brewe, which contains about six hundred acres, cost fourteen thousand pounds.

Mr. Longfield was a native of Queenstown. His agent was Savage French, a native of Kusskeny, a place near Queenstown. His first rent warner was Henry Galy, a native of Toormore, who lived in Schull, in a house occupied at present by a family called Galy's. Several times when Savage French, the agent was sick or absent, he gathered the rent. He kept