

Boyle Surname

Origins and History

Thoughts on the Boyle Surname



Dan in front of Boyle Ruins, Faugher Townland

Boyle is a true Irish surname, but it is not exclusively Irish. In fact some of the most famous Boyles in Ireland were of English origin. Richard Boyle, the first and great Earl of Cork, and his descendants come to mind. There were, and are, English Boyles and Scots ones as well, and now there are Boyles scattered wherever the Irish, English, and Scots Boyles emigrated. This article deals with the native Irish (Gaelic) Boyles.

BOYLE: A TRUE IRISH SURNAME

In the modern Irish language Boyle is O Baoighill, now shortened to O Baoill. In early times au was used instead of O. In Irish the name is pronounced something like “au Bweel.” O Baoighill has been translated into English as O Boyle, Boyle, Boghill, Bohill, and Hill. Boyle does not share a root meaning with other Irish “oyle” names, Coyle, Doyle, and Moyle. Boyle is related to



Boylan, but has been a separate name since the 1100s.

Other variant spellings of Boyle I have encountered are O Boill and O Buyle. O Boill appears in the *Book of Arms*, dated 1690, which lists Irish septs entitled to a coat of arms. O Buyle shows prominently on the Donegal portion of an Irish map produced in 1567. There are other variations—Boal, Boil, and Boyles for instance.

Irish Boyle Crest

The Boyle-Ireland coat of arms came into existence centuries ago. The process of creating coats of arms (also often called family crests) began in the eight and ninth centuries. The new art of Heraldry made it possible for families and even individual family members to have their very own coat of arms.



The meaning of the symbols.

Tree: Antiquity and Strength. In Ireland the Oak tree was the most noble of the Chieftain trees.

Green: Hope, loyalty in love.

Gold or Yellow: Generosity

THE O BOYLE-BOYLE CONNECTION

Once on a business trip I meet a man named Peterson. He asked me if my name had originally been O Boyle. I told him that since the O meant grandson or male descendant, there was a Boyle before there was an O Boyle. He replied "Just like there was a Peter..." He blushed to the top of his ears and didn't continue. I added "before there was a Peterson." We were both right. There was a Boyle before there was an O Boyle, but the name in Ireland was O Boyle for centuries. The O was dropped by most families after the English got control of the northern



Boyle Ruins, Faugher Townland near Dunaghany

part of the island of Ireland (Ulster) in the very early 1600s. Ulster was the last province of Ireland to succumb to the English. Curiously, to me at least, the O Boyle form continued to be used in County Mayo even in the 1800s.

FEMININE FORM OF O BOYLE



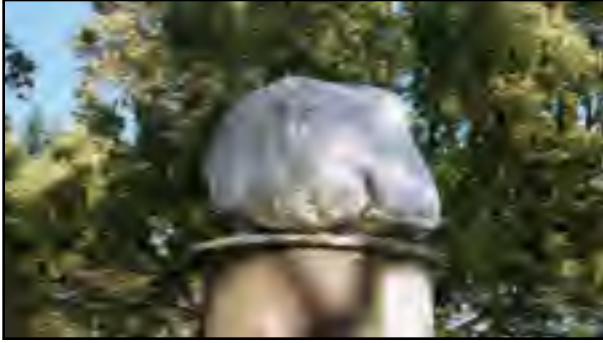
View from our home exchange near Cresslough.

Since O Boyle has a masculine meaning, women used a feminine form of the name. Irish speaking, and writing, women still do. Women used Ny in early times; Ni is used now. Mary Boyle in English is Maire Ni Baoill in Irish.

ORIGIN OF THE O BOYLE NAME

Accounts differ. Ancient Irish genealogies are not consistent and are not easily subject to historical verification. I have seen two versions. One shows that Maoldun, a brother of Muriartus, No. 99 on the O Donnell pedigree was the ancestor of O Baoghail. Another indicates

that it was Buidhill O Donnell, a great 12th century warrior, who gave his name to posterity as O Buidhill, afterwards O Boyle. His title was Lord of Boylagh. At least there is consistency that O Boyle is an offshoot of O Donnell. O Donnell, in turn, is an offshoot of O Neill.



Boyle Stone Cloginbeely Village

ANCIENT ANCESTRY

The ancestry of the native Irish O Boyle clan goes back through the O Donnells and O Neills to Niall of the Nine Hostages, King of Ireland, AD 379; to Con of the 100 battles, King of Ireland, AD 148; and to Heremon, the eighth son of Milesius, King of Spain.

Heremon was the first King of Ireland, after defeating earlier Irish residents called Tuatha de Danann. (There is a current group of Irish musicians named after them.) Of course there is a problem separating historical fact from fancy. Scholars agree that Niall of the Nine Hostages was a historical person. They are less sure of Con of the 100 Battles, and believe that Milesius and Heremon are entirely mythical.

From the 1100s until well after 1600, the O Boyles were a substantial family in Donegal. Other prominent family names in Donegal were O Donnell, O Gallagher, O Doherty, MacSwine (McSweeney), O Cahan and O Duffy.

ANNALS OF THE FOUR MASTERS

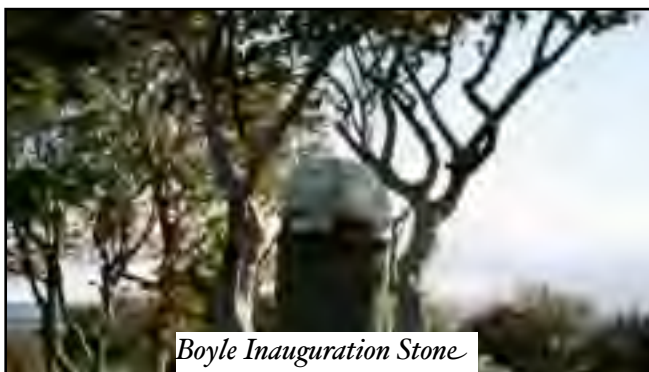
In the *Annals of the Four Masters* (AFM) there are 72 references to O Boyle individuals and 12 references to the O Boyle family. The individual references range in time from 1131 when Garbhanach O Boyle was slain to 1611 when Niall O Boyle was Bishop of Raphoe. O Boyle family references span the period 1197 until 1592. Here are a few additional entries.

- 1) 1223 A.D. "Tadgh O Baighill (namely son of Ceallach), splendour of the North of Ireland died."
- 2) 1259 A. D. "Sigraídh O Baighill was killed by his own kinsmen."
- 3) 1517 A. D. "Donagh, the son of Turlough O Boyle, a man who for his means, was the best gentleman, and who carried out the most war, and performed the most dangerous exploits, of all who came from his tribe, set out with a crew of a boat for Torach; but a wind drove them westwards through the sea and no tidings of them were ever since heard."
- 4) 1530 A.D. "Conor Oge O Boyle, Tanist of Boylagh, was slain by the sons of O Boyle (Niall, the son of Turlough) on the Leacach, on the 6th of January."
- 5) 1532 A. D. "Mary, the daughter of McSweeney Fanad, and wife of O Boyle, died suddenly, after having been thrown from her horse, at the door of her own mansion, on 21st April."

Item 4 benefits from an explanation. Irish chieftains were elected, not chosen on a hereditary basis. During the lifetime of a chieftain, his successor was elected. The successor's title was Tanist. He served as an assistant chieftain and man in training. In this case the Tanist likely was from a different branch of the O Boyle clan and the sons of the current O Boyle chieftain eliminated him probably to improve the chances of one of them being elected Tanist to succeed their father.

PLACES IN COUNTY DONEGAL WITH A BOYLE CONNECTION

Boyle consistently has been the third most common surname in Donegal. So there are few places in Donegal without a Boyle connection. A few of the most prominent are:



- 1) The three tuathas (districts in the very northwest corner of Donegal where the O Boyles originated. These districts are Rosguill, Clochaneely, and Tory. Tory is an island off the north coast of Donegal.
- 2) Cloginheely village, where the O Boyle chieftains were inaugurated. The inauguration stone is still there.
- 3) Ballyweel, (also Ballyboyle) on the sea close to Donegal town. The name of the village means “home of the O Boyles.” Tadhg Oge, the last inaugurated chieftain of the O Boyles died at Drumark near here in May 1607.
- 4) Faugher townland, near the village of Dunfanaghy. Here are the ruins of the house and bawn erected by Turlogh Roe O Boyle soon after 1611 when he received a grant of 2,000 acres as part of the Plantation of Ulster. Turlogh Roe is the name in English. Turlough Rua is the name in Irish. Rua is the Irish word for red. (Any redheads among us?). Turlough was the son of the last inaugurated O Boyle chieftain, Tadhg Oge. Tadge Oge was the son of Tadgh, who was the son of Turlough. Oge is Irish for young.)



Doon Fort



Kiltorish

Feugiat: *Duis aute in voluptate veli*

- 5) Loughdoon near Portnoo. There is an island in Loughdoon. On the island is a very large oval stone wall which surrounds most of the island. It is usually called Doon Fort, but I like one of its other names better, “The Cattle Fort of the O Boyles.” It was constructed about 1,000 years before Christ was born.
- 6) Kiltorish, in the Barony of Boylagh, where the O Boyles were most numerous and continued to be prominent, even after the Plantation of Ulster in 1611 and the rebellion of the native Irish Catholics against the English and Scots Plantation settlers in 1641. As late as 1659 Turlough Ballagh O Boyle had enough land to support 57 Irish tenants.

OCCURRENCE AND DISTRIBUTION OF BOYLE AND O BOYLE

At the time of the Griffith’s Primary Valuation (begun in 1848, completed by 1864), there were 2202 Boyle families and 120 O Boyle families living in Ireland. Seven Irish Counties each had more than 100 Boyle families recorded. They are Donegal, Derry, Armagh, Antrim, Mayo and Tyrone. Donegal had more Boyle families, 813, than the other six combined.

Baronies in Donegal with 125 or more Boyle Families	
Boylagh	393
Kilmacrean	149
Banagh	125

Early Christian Names

The most frequent Boyle male Christian names recorded in the AFM are

- ★Donnell,
- ★Turlough,
- ★Niall,
- ★Teige (Tadgh),
- ★Conor.

Female Christian names used were

- ★Mary,
- ★Margaret,
- ★Rose.



Sheephaven Bay

CONCLUSION

As the English gained and maintained control of Ireland, the O Boyle name declined until by 1890, the Boyle

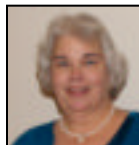
form was used 13 times more often than O Boyle. At that time Boyle was the 46th most common name in Ireland. O Boyle was very far down the list of surnames. Recently there is a trend toward resuming use of the O Boyle form. Any takers?

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