Copyright 2026

THE ORIGINS OF CLAN MAHON OF COUNTIES OFFALY AND CARLOW

By

James P McMahon

September 2026



In 2003 I visited Ireland and carried with me 3 DNA kits by Family Tree DNA. My purpose was to test the oral histories of the Mahon Clan against the what data would emerge from DNA. This was a personal journey in that the Mahons of Cooldorragh Glebe in Ballyboy are my ancestors and cousins. DNA testing would therefore reveal my own history.

The Killurin Mahons have an oral history of having descended from the Monaghan McMahon of Oriel. And the Cooldorragh Glebe Mahons had an oral history that suggested either the Clare McMahons or Oriel McMahon had been present in Offaly, which is true, and launched their clan. Neither oral history is accurate. It appears to me that the Mahon families of Offaly (and Carlow) represent a very small clan that arose separately and was perhaps largely eliminated by the various tribal conflicts and subsequent numerous Norman invasions.

This presentation does not apply to all persons named Mahon. It appears that the name sprung up in numerous places in the Midlands and Southern Ireland. In the territories I have explored as possible places of origin there appear to be at least three different Mahon clans who are not genetically related. Or they are not related in a way that matters. A significant portion of all the Irish stem from an influx of people about 4000 years ago. This immigration event is represented by Rathlin Man, an individual unearthed on Rathlin Island. Rathlin Man is representative of that immigration and most of us are related to that degree. I am instead focused on identifying our heritage in the realm of 300 CE to 1800 CE. After this point there are records we can trace but during that time span the only way to track our history is through the use of DNA testing.

There are at least three distinct Mahon families in County Offaly. One family, represented by Mahon kit 15092, is centered at Killurin in Geashill. A second Mahon family is represented by historical farmers in Birr and attorneys in Tullamore today who have not tested their DNA, so this paper cannot be said to apply to them. The third is ours, and it's centered at Cooldorragh Glebe in Ballyboy. DNA has shown that ours is closely related to a group of Mahons that resides near Borris in County Carlow. Because they exactly match the Mahon clan of Cooldorragh Glebe, they likely descend from a brother of John Mahon of Cooldorragh Glebe who died in 1840.

From the McMahon DNA Project on Family Tree DNA we see:

Kit	name	ancestor	haplotype
15092	Killurin Mahon	Mahon, d.2003	R-S5456 67 marker test
14151	McMahon (USA)	John Mahon, d 1840 Cooldorragh Glebe	R-S5456 67 marker test
14150	Mahon	John Mahon, d 1840 Cooldorragh Glebe	R-L21 25 marker test
MK94187	McMahon (USA)	John Mahon, d 1840 Cooldorragh Glebe	R-FTD95602 Big Y700
194111	McMahon (USA)	Michael Mahon, b 1800, County Carlow	R-DF21 67 marker test

DNA TESTING

DNA testing reveals your history in two ways. First, by what are called the haplotypes or the genetic makeup of your DNA. These are called SNPs. **SNP matches** refer to identical points or segments of DNA where two or more people share the same single-nucleotide variation (a **single-nucleotide polymorphism**, or **SNP**, pronounced "snip") at a specific location in the genome. In our case the assigned numbers to this genetic sequence are:

WHAT DO THE NUMBERS SAY?

FGC3213] (DF21>FGC3213>ZZ1-1>S5459>S5456E1> S5456E1> S5456>Z29558)>R-FTD95602

The key features in the above numbers are:

DF21 – a marker that represents the Bell Beaker and Celtic lineages of Ireland (source: FTDNA), having a common ancestor with Rathlin Man 4000 years ago.

S5456 – known both as the Aran Variety (DYS 390=23, DYS 385b =11) and the Galway Bay Cluster, thought to suggest that the marker ties its carriers to western Galway. Most common ancestor approximately 300 CE.

Z29558 – most recent common ancestor: 100 – 600 CE, represents at least two of the Delbhna tribes: Delbhna bEthra and Delbhna Cuile Fabhair. It may well represent additional Delbhna tribes which have not yet been adequately identified genetically, such as Delbhna Nuadat.

R-FTD95602 – this is an unmatched SNP that will only be further defined when other RELATED Mahons join the project using a Big Y700 test. Doing so will allow us to further explore and fine tune our origins.

Conclusion: These markers dispel the notion that the Mahon clans of Offaly are descended from either the Monaghan or Clare McMahon lineages. The Mahon DNA does not match either clan. If you would like to see the specific SNPs of these clans you may visit the McMahon Project on FTDNA. FamilyTreeDNA - McMahon Project DNA Results

WHAT DO THE MATCHES SAY:

The other way that DNA reveals your history is by showing you other individuals with whom you match at various (i.e. 25, 37,67,or 111) locations (markers) along the Y chromosome. The # of repetitions of short sequences of genetic code at these markers are called short tandem repeats (STRs). These STRs are heritable from father to son and matched to others to derive genetic distance (GD) between matches. The lower the GD. the closer the match through GD

count. A GD up to 2 is significant at 25 markers and GD counts as high as 4 at 37 markers, 7 at 67 markers, and 10 at 111 markers, are all considered to represent matches within the last millennium. When you match someone that means the paths of your ancestors have crossed, quite literally, at some point in the past. You have exchanged genes. You share a common ancestor. This can only take place if you are within proximity to one another.

For those skeptical of 25 marker matches we are only using them to demonstrate long ago connections to Coughlan, leaders of Delbhna bEthra and King/Conroy, leaders of Delbhna Tir da Locha.

Coughlin -

The Cooldorragh Mahon match 3 Coughlins at 2 off 25 markers. Many geneticists would dismiss this connection as random, however the multiple matches suggest an ancient connection to me.

The Killurin Mahon match 6 Coughlins at 25 markers suggesting a greater connection and placing them farther east than the Cooldorragh Mahons circa 300 CE.

County Offaly (The Midlands): The *Mac Cochláin* (MacCoughlan) sept was part of the Dal gCais tribal grouping and held territory in the barony of Garrycastle, near Banagher (Delbhna bEarthra) and the ancient monastic settlement of Clonmacnoise.

These would be our direct chieftains with Delbhna bEarthra – yet, notably, we do not match them closely in recent times. We match these other names more closely and that does not make sense if we are Delbhna bEarthra.

Coughlins were allied with Molloy in the 1600 and 1700s so apparently still around and fighting but had lost their lands.

It's my opinion that if we were Delbhna bEthra we would match the Coughlins more closely at a greater number of markers.

King/Conroy:

The Cooldorragh Glebe Mahon match 11 King/Conroy at 25 markers suggesting an ancient connection. The Killurin Mahons match none. This suggests to me that the Cooldorragh Glebe Mahons started out in western Galway while the Killurin Mahons started farther east.

Delbhna Tír Dhá Locha originated around **c. 800 AD** (in early historic records of Gaelic Ireland) and effectively "died" or was displaced as a distinct ruling territory in the **11th century**. [1, 2]

- **Origination:** The territory (meaning "Delbhna of the Two Lakes") emerged as a *tuath* (petty kingdom/territory) in what is now County Galway, ruled by a branch of the

Delbhna who claimed descent from Lugh Delbáeth. Its dynastic rulers later adopted the surname Mac Con Raoi (MacConroy / Conroy). [1, 2, 3, 4]

- **Decline/Displacement:** During the 11th century, the territory was overrun when the **Ó Flaithbheartaigh (O'Flaherty) family** was pushed westward by advancing conflicts and displaced the local rulers, taking over the lands. The clan's remnants were subsequently integrated or pushed further into Connemara

If we are related to King and Conroy (at 25 markers) that tells me that we were in far western Galway early on, perhaps circa 300 AD or earlier. Now that could be wrong, but we wouldn't match them if we weren't related somehow and that takes proximity.

Lambe - Cooldorragh Glebe match at 3 off 37 and 5 off 67 makers. Killurin Mahon match 7 off 67 makers

I place him at 1500 nearby to East Galway

The native Irish surname Lambe first established itself in **County Limerick** in the south and the ancient territory of **Oriel (Oirghialla)** in the north, originating from two separate native Gaelic septs known as ***Ó Luain***. [1, 2]

- **Gaelic Roots:** The name *Ó Luain* translates to "descendant of the warrior" (from *luan*, meaning warrior or champion). [1, 2]
- **The Limerick Sept:** The *Ó Luain* chiefs in Munster were lords of Deisbeg in County Limerick **before being dispersed following the Anglo-Norman invasion in 1210**.

Egan and Egain – each Mahon clan matches one Egan at 4 off of 37 markers

I place them at 1600 East Galway – place name is Shannonbridge

The MacEgan clan (derived from the Gaelic Mac Aodhagáin, meaning "son of the little bright-eyed one") is one of Europe's oldest documented families. Originating in the 10th century from the ancient kingdom of Uí Maine, they became famous across Ireland not as warriors, but as elite hereditary Brehons (lawyers, judges, and legal scholars).

Duniry (Irish: *Dún Doighre*) is a rural townland and small village community in County Galway, Ireland, situated about 10 kilometers southeast of Loughrea. Noted for the now-derelict Egan's Castle (which flourished from 1450 to 1600) and historical ties to the compilation of *An Leabhar Breac* in the early 15th century. So this would be southern Galway.

Carr – Cooldorragh Glebe Mahon off by 7 at 67 markers, Killurin do not match

I'm placing them at 1250 – 1400 CE

native Gaelic roots of the surname Carr (primarily *Ó Carra* and *Mac Giolla Chathair*) resided mainly in **County Galway** in the west and **County Donegal** in the northwest. [1, 2, 3]

County Galway (Connaught): The name existed as an Anglicized form of the Gaelic patronymic *Ó Carra* (descendant of Carra). [1, 2]

Keane Kane and Cain – Cooldorragh Glebe Mahon 4 off at 37, 5 off at 67, Killurin Mahon 7 off at 67.

Thomas Keane off by 6, Cain off by 7 from Cooldoragh Glebe Mahon

Kane is S5456 suggesting Galway Bay

2 below is our most likely match. I'm placing them at 1300 (Killurin) – 1500 CE (CG)

Regional Spelling Variations: While **Kane** and **O'Kane** became the predominant forms in **Ulster**, the southern branch of the same Gaelic root in Munster and Connacht more commonly anglicized their name as **Keane**

Historically, families who took the modern anglicized name **Keane** in County Galway belonged to two entirely different medieval roots located in three main regions:

1. The Lough Mask / Cong Border Region (The *Ó Cadhain* Root)

The most ancient, definitive medieval homeland for the western branch of the name (historically *Ó Cadhain*, later translated to **Kyne**, **Coyne**, and **Keane**) is along the Galway-Mayo border. [1, 2]

2. East Galway & the River Shannon (The *Ó Catháin Uí Fiachrach* Root)

A completely separate, native Connacht branch of the *Ó Catháin* sept (independent of the famous Ulster clan) lived in the eastern plains of Galway. [1, 2, 3]

- **The Barony of Longford:** This sept originally held territory as chieftains of the *Cenél Ianna* and *Cenél Sédna* tribal groupings in southeast Galway. [1]
- **Clonfert:** The earliest recorded historical figure of this specific lineage was Eoghan Ó Catháin, who served as the Abbot of Clonfert and died there in 980 AD. [1, 2]

- **Ballynakill Parish:** Following the 13th-century Anglo-Norman incursions, this eastern *Ó Catháin* branch was gradually dispossessed of their primary dynastic lands and forced to resettle further south into the parish of **Ballynakill**. [1]

3. Connemara & West Galway (The Modern Era)

As the centuries progressed, the *Ó Cadhain* / Keane family became highly concentrated in the western, Irish-speaking **Gaeltacht** regions of Connemara. [1, 2]

- Centuries of local history have deeply rooted the name Keane into modern west Galway geography—evidenced by local landmarks like the historic Keane's of Maam Bridge along the mountain passes of Connemara. [1, 2]

Murray – O'Muireadhaigh- off by 7 of 67 for Cooldoragh Glebe Mahon

I'm placing them in Athlone, 1300 CE
the indigenous holders of the native Gaelic surname *Ó Muireadhaigh* (later anglicized as **Murray**) primarily resided in **County Roscommon and East Galway** (within the territory of the Uí Maine tribal grouping), as well as parts of **County Down** and **County Cork**. [1, 2]
Key Locations in 1250

- **South Roscommon / East Galway:** The most prominent historical sept of *Ó Muireadhaigh* was established here in the central plains of Connacht. [1, 2]

MAHON FAMILIES

Hugh Mahon - the Killurin Mahon, the other Mahon family in Offaly, matches us at 6 off 67 markers. Match the Carlow Mahon at 5 off of 67 markers.

This match could be as far back as 1200 or 1400. The latter makes the most sense to me. The same tribal origin as us. After surnames became established. Same ancestor in the Dealbhna community. Interestingly has 4 Coughlin matches at 25 markers and no King or Conroy matches, suggesting Dealbhna bEathra. I suggest 1400 in East Galway near Shannonbridge.

Mick Mahon – County Carlow, married 1795 – matches Seamus Mahon (kit 14150) of Cooldorragh Glebe Mahon exactly to 25 markers, as far as Seamus was tested. Matches the US branch of the Cooldorragh Glebe Mahons by 1 off at 67 markers, the same as our match to Seamus. Matches the Killurin Mahons at 5 off 67 markers.

The Cooldorragh Glebe Mahons have immediate family in Carlow. Most likely the brothers of John Mahon, Sr, died 1840. Because we match exactly one can assume that we have not been apart for very long. 150 years or less. We either descend from this family or our ancestor John Mahon, d. 1840, was a brother to one of Mick's brothers.

Either the Ballyboy and Carlow Mahons fled a Norman invasion circa 1600 (the Nine Years War) in East Galway or Offaly south of Shannonbridge to Carlow and then one brother returned home to Ballyboy two hundred years later or an unknown and unaccounted for Offaly Mahon left and moved to Carlow.

Westmeath Mahon – a recent addition to the project has tested 37 markers and upgraded to Big Y700 so we'll have more data in a couple of months. His ancestors hail from Moyvore, County Westmeath dating back to 1866, possibly 1816. Matches Seamus Mahon of Coodorragh Glebe exactly at 25 markers, the extent to which Seamus was tested. Is 2 off 37 markers of the US Mahons from Cooldorragh Glebe and 1 off from the Carlow Mahons. This fellow may represent our homeland.

THE NON-MARITAL PROGENY

Butler – Born in Newfoundland circa 1830s, thought to be from Waterford Ireland. 4 off 67 markers both clans, 9 off 111 markers for Cooldorragh Glebe Mahon.

Most certainly this Butler is a Mahon (project manager of the Butler project). The most likely scenario, although conjecture, is that our Carlow Mahons interacted with a woman of The Butler's Earl of Ormonde Estate in the early 1600s. However, this is a hypothesis to be further refined if possible. This would tie into the Mahons moving from their Delbhna homelands to Carlow coinciding with loss of lands.

Byrnes – 7 off 67 markers both clans – I place him at about 1300 CE

Another R-S5456. Possible connections:

1. The Ó Braoin (O'Breen) of Westmeath / Delbhna Mór

The **Delbhna Mór** ("Great Delbhna") occupied what is now the barony of Delvin in **County Westmeath**. Right on the borders of this territory lived the powerful clan **Ó Braoin** (anglicized as **O'Breen** or **Breen**).

- **The Connection:** Over the centuries, many branches of the *Ó Braoin* clan in the midlands dropped the "ee" sound and transitioned their name directly into **Byrne** or **Byrnes** due to phonetic shifting. If your ancestors were Delbhna-adjacent in Westmeath, this is a prime candidate.

2. The Ó Birn (O'Beirne) of Roscommon / Delbhna Sith Neannta

The **Delbhna Sith Neannta** were a branch of the Delbhna who settled around Fairymount in **County Roscommon**. Roscommon is the absolute cradle of the **Ó Birn** (O'Beirne) sept.

- **The Connection:** In Connacht, the name *Ó Birn* is pronounced almost identically to *O'Byrne*. Though completely unrelated to the Leinster O'Byrnes by blood, massive numbers of Roscommon Ó Birn descendants anglicized their name to **Byrne, Byrnes, or Burns**. The Byrne/Burns/Beirne DNA Project has proven that this Connacht lineage forms an entirely separate genetic cluster from the Wicklow clans.

3. Delbhna Cuile Fabhair & Delbhna Tíre Dá Locha (Galway)

The Delbhna had major tribal territories in **County Galway**, specifically eastern Galway (*Delbhna Cuile Fabhair*) and western Galway (*Delbhna Tíre Dá Locha* between Lough Corrib and Lough Derg). [1]

- **The Connection:** While the ruling chiefs of these Galway Delbhna branches took names like MacCoghlan or O'Conor, the ordinary clansmen and minor septs within the Delbhna tribal umbrella routinely adopted surnames based on local features or minor ancestors. Genetic alignment with the "Byrnes" surname here typically indicates a branch of the Roscommon *Ó Birn* that moved south into Galway, or a phonetic anglicization of a localized western name like *Mac Conboirne* (originally from nearby Mayo but spread throughout Connacht).

Summary of Your 1300 CE Profile

In 1300 CE, your ancestors would **not** have been using the spelling "Byrnes". They were a Gaelic-speaking family deeply rooted in the **Delbhna** tribes of the Irish Midlands or Connacht. Depending on their exact county, they would have been known as either the **Ó Braoin** (Westmeath) or the **Ó Birn** (Roscommon/Galway).

Our Byrne matches us and in the Byrne project at FTDNA is not grouped with any of the above families. As we identify our tribe through more testing, we will be able to tell which his mother was a part of.

THE DELBHNA TRIBAL CONFEDERATION

The **Delbhna** were never a singular dominant superpower in the Irish midlands, as they spent most of the historical era as a subject people under more powerful dynasties. However, their period of greatest independent influence and presence in the midlands occurred prior to the late 5th century, before they were subjugated by the expansion of the **Uí Néill** and **Uí Maine**

- **Pre-Late 5th Century (Peak Tribal Era):** Early historical accounts suggest the Delbhna initially held unified or prominent tribal territories across the midlands and parts of Connacht.

- **Late 5th Century (Subjugation):** By the end of the 5th century, the **Southern Uí Néill** expanded aggressively into the midlands (Mide), reducing the midland branches of the Delbhna to a subject or tributary status.
- **8th Century (Individual Prominence):** Despite being subject peoples, individual branches occasionally achieved high prestige. In the 8th century, the chief of the **Delbhna Mór** (located in modern-day County Westmeath) was recorded as a highly regarded champion in Ireland. Conversely, the western midlands branch (**Delbhna Nuadat**) was decisively crushed by the Uí Maine at the Battle of Bealach Cro in **751 AD** during a war for control of Athlone.
- **High Middle Ages (Lordship Era):** While they no longer ruled broad sections of the midlands, specific septs retained localized control for centuries. The *Delbhna bEthra* (under the **MacCochláin** or MacCoughlan family) maintained an autonomous lordship in Garrycastle, County Offaly that persisted until the Tudor conquests of the 16th century.
-



DELBHNA TERRITORIES

Of the Delbhna tribes these in particular may be our ancestral tribe.

Delbhna bEthra once formed a single kingdom with the Delbhna Nuadat until subjugated by the Uí Maine. By the late 5th century they had fallen under the control of the Uí Néill and their territory was what is now Garrycastle in County Offaly.

Delbhna Cuile Fabhair once held Maigh Seóla, the area east of Lough Corrib in western County Galway,

Delbhna Nuadat - or *Delbhna Uí Maine*, were lords of a large section that is now Athlone in County Roscommon, situated between the Suck and Shannon Rivers and parts of East Galway.

Delbhna Teannmhaige – held the area of Westmeath east and north of Athlone.

Delbhna Síth Neannta: Small territory near Fairymount, County Roscommon.

Delbhna Mór: Represented today by the barony of *Delvin*, County Westmeath.

CONCLUSIONS

Both the Cooldorragh Glebe and Killurin Mahon families as well as the Carlow Mahon family descend from the Delbhna Tribal Confederation. The genetics suggests Delbhna bEthra or Delbhna Cuile Fabhair but in part because those two tribes have been linked to haplotype Z29558 by 21 different DNA testers (DF21 project).

There are too many Galway matches to be ignored. There are also no Offaly matches. Another possibility suggested by the number of Galway matches is Delbhna Nuadat. Delbhna Nuadat (Athlone in County Roscommon, situated between the Suck and Shannon Rivers and eastern County Galway) was defeated by the Ui Maine in the year 751 CE (Wikipedia). Afterwards the Delbhna mixed genetically with Ui Maine names which would include Egan, Cain, Keane, Lambe and others mentioned above.

There were far too few Cooldorragh Glebe Mahons in 1840 to suggest Ballyboy as their place of origin. All of them descend from John Mahon and Rose Molloy, circa 1845, grandfather John Mahon, Sr, d. 1840. It is much more likely that they relocated there from someplace else due to some Norman incursion. Having an exact genetic match in the Borris area of County Carlow confounds the picture.

The Killurin Mahons may have been present in Offaly as far back as the early 1600s as suggested by written correspondence (James Mahon to Hugh Mahon, Australia). Still, their matches

suggest close ancient ties to the Cooldorragh Glebe and Carlow Mahons in a location other than Offaly prior to the 1600s.

WHATS NEXT

In order to draw further conclusions and hone in on the exact place of origin we need additional FTDNA Big Y 700 testers from the following families: Killurin Mahon, Carlow Mahon, the Birr/Tullamore Mahon family if interested, the Mahon families living in Banagher and Lusmagh (near the border with Galway), Mahon families Athlone and Westmeath, and eastern Galway, particularly Clonfert if the testing family dates to before the time of the Castlegar Mahons.

Each Big Y 700 tester can reveal further terminal SNPs and potential matches. This would aid in defining the specific Delbhna tribal affiliations of the Mahon families living in Counties Offaly and Carlow.

XXX

NOTE: Some of the data on clan names and locations and the Delbhna history have been generated by AI. I don't claim credit for any errors it has made.

This is an evolving story. Input is welcome and updates will be made as DNA testers join the project at FTDNA.

Contact:

James P McMahon (USA)

Jim @ jamespmcmahon . com

970-259-2171 (landline)