# A Survey of Irish Surnames 1992-97

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### Origin of Surnames

A surname may be defined as an hereditary second or family name handed down from one generation to the next, and it can be distinguished from a first or personal name which refers only to an individual.[1] There was no fixed beginning or end to the period during which surnames began to be used in Europe, the process being associated with social and economic development and the need to have a more reliable means of identifying individuals for taxation and other purposes. Neither were surnames adopted at the same time by all classes, and in general, the rich and powerful and urban dwellers assumed them first, while the poor and rural dwellers tended to be slower to adopt them.

The process of adopting surnames started earlier in some areas, while in others it started later and in some places continued even down to the 19th century. Hanks and Hodges have pointed out that while it was the norm in Europe in the 11th century that people were without surnames, by the 15th century it was the norm that they did possess them.[2] The evolution of hereditary surnames has been linked to feudalism, population growth and the replacement of the joint or collective family by the nuclear family, which necessitated a more precise system of identification.[3] Yet there cannot be said to be an exact correlation between adoption of surnames and social and economic development, as the Scandinavian countries were slow to adopt fixed second names and to this day most Icelanders do not have fixed surnames.

Similarly, while Ireland has been perceived as insular and generally slow to adapt to European trends, it was one of the earliest countries to adopt surnames, the principal period of second name formation being the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Smyth's analysis of the Annals of Ulster and Inisfallen shows that less than 4% of surnames had come into existence before 970, about 12-15% originated between 970-1019, about 25-28% between 1020-1069, about 30-33% between 1070-1120 and about 23-25% between 1120-69.[4] Paucity of records makes it harder to indicate the rate at which the common people adopted hereditary second names in Ireland, but MacLysaght has observed that as late as the seventeenth century there were still numbers of people

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1 Earlier drafts of a number of the tables in the present article were unfortunately subject to plagiarism, as detailed more fully in 'Plagiarism: An Open Letter to the Genealogical Society of Ireland', http://homepage.eircom.net/~seanjmurphy/dir/plagiarism.html, accessed 18 June 2014.

2 Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges, *A Dictionary of Surnames*, Oxford 1989, page vii.

3 Robert Fossier, 'The Feudal Era (Eleventh-Thirteenth Centuries), André Burguière and others, Editors, *History of the Family*, 1, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996 Edition, pages 412-13, 420-21.

4 William J Smyth, *Atlas of Family Names in Ireland*, 3, part 2, page 1, http://publish.ucc.ie/doi/atlas? section=N1021A, accessed 13 April 2010 (my thanks to a student for drawing attention to this reference).

among the lower orders who did not use hereditary surnames.[5]

Surnames can best be understood firstly by dividing them into two main classes, monogenetic and polygenetic.[6] Monogenetic surnames have a single origin from one individual or family, possible examples being Faherty or Asquith, while polygenetic surnames arose independently in different places and at different times, examples being Murphy or Smith. Surnames can be further divided into four broad classes, namely, those derived from ancestral personal names or patronymics, those derived from placenames or toponymics, occupational names derived from trade or status, and descriptive names referring to an individual's person or appearance.[7]

### Surnames in Ireland

As was the case in other ancient societies, the inhabitants of Ireland in early times were known by one, personal name, eg, Art, Conn or Niall, as surnames had yet to evolve. It is true that the Irish had from a remote period a system of collective or 'people-names'. These names were used in the plural and referred to the whole population group, or probably more accurately, to its ruling dynastic elite or aristocracy. Examples of these people-names include the Uí Néill, descendants of the possibly mythical Niall of the Nine Hostages, the Uí Briúin, descendants of his brother Brian, and the Eóghanachta and Dál gCais, descendants of the probably mythical Eóghan Mór and Cormac Cas respectively. Woulfe has pointed out that many of these ancient names are similar in form to modern family names, and he cautioned against confusing them. Thus, for example, Muintear Ifearnáin is the ancient people-name of the O'Quins of Thomond and the family name of the O'Heffernans of Owney, while Clann Dálaigh is the people-name of the O'Donnells of Tirconnell and should not be taken as only referring to the surname Daly.[8]

Given the high profile of Irish 'clans', it is worthwhile noting that MacLysaght specifically stated that he avoided the term 'clan' in the Irish context, because 'its use might imply the existence in Ireland of a clan system like that so highly developed in Scotland, which in fact we never had in this country'. MacLysaght preferred instead to use the term 'sept', which he defined as a 'collective term describing a group of persons who, or whose immediate and known ancestors, bore a common surname and inhabited the same locality'.[9]

While feudalism did not develop in Ireland at the same pace as in the rest of Europe, nevertheless as society became more complex and population grew there must have arisen difficulties of identification, so that personal names were no longer sufficient and a further distinction became necessary. From an early period a system of temporary patronymics was in use, whereby Mac was fixed to the genitive case of the father's name, or Ua or Ó to that of the grandfather, eg, Cormac Mac Airt, Laoghaire Mac Néill, and so on. Yet these second names were not surnames in the modern sense of the term, in that they were not fixed or hereditary or common to all members of a

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5 Edward MacLysaght, *Irish Families: Their Names, Arms and Origins*, 4th Edition, Dublin 1985, pages 15, 20.
6 Hanks and Hodges, *Dictionary of Surnames*, pages xvi-xvii.
7 A good mnemonic for the first two terms is 'monopoly', while the first letters of the four classes of surnames, ancestral, place, occupational and descriptive, spell 'APOD' (think of 'peas in a pod').
8 Rev Patrick Woulfe, *Sloinnte Gaedheal is Gall: Irish Names and Surnames*, Dublin 1923, pages 685-86.
9 MacLysaght, *Irish Families*, page 12.

family, and they ceased to be used when the individual so described died.

When this system of transient patronymics itself became insufficient, surnames began to evolve in the 11th and three centuries following. The patronymic began to become fixed and hereditary, not in a planned way, but by a process of gradual evolution. Keating and O'Curry claimed that surnames became fixed in Ireland as a result of an edict of King Brian Boru. However, both Woulfe and MacLysaght state that there is no basis for this claim. Indeed Brian himself did not adopt a surname, as it was only in his grandson's time that the surname Ó Briain or O'Brien first came into existence, 'Boru' or Bóruma being in fact a nickname meaning 'of the tributes'.

The process by which fixed surnames came into use in Ireland was thus as gradual and unplanned as elsewhere, in short, it was an evolutionary process in response to societal changes. In general, the named ancestors after whom the most distinguished Irish families were named flourished in the period from the middle of the 9th and the end of the 13th century. Another characteristic of Gaelic Irish surnames is that the great majority are patronymic, that is, derived from named ancestors and prefixed by Ó or Mac, as surnames derived directly from places, occupations or nicknames are relatively uncommon. The polygenetic origin of a significant number of Gaelic surnames must also be kept in mind, so that for example Murphy, the most common surname in Ireland, derives from three distinct and unrelated Ó Murchadha septs which arose in Cork, Roscommon and Wexford, as well as from a fourth Mac Murchadha sept associated with Tyrone and later Armagh.

### Anglicisation of Surnames

As is well-known, the Anglo-Norman invaders failed completely to subdue Gaelic Ireland, and indeed in some cases they themselves adopted Gaelic ways. The Statutes of Kilkenny were passed in 1366 in an effort to halt and reverse this process of Hibernicisation. One of the provisions required that every Englishman should use the English language, 'leaving off entirely the manner of naming used by the Irish'.[10] A statute from the time of Edward IV a century later in 1465 was aimed at those Irish living among the English in the Pale, requiring them among other things to take 'an English surname of a town, as Sutton, Chester, Trim, Skreen, Cork, Kinsale, or a colour, as White, Black, Brown, or an art, as Smith or Carpenter, or an office, as Cook, Butler'.[11]

English administrators and planters during the Tudor period displayed particular hostility to the Irish use of 'Mac' and 'O' prefixes. Thus Edmund Spenser wrote in a work published in 1596, 'I also wish all the Os and the Macs which the heads of the septs have taken to their names to be utterly forbidden and extinguished'.[12] Sir Richard Bingham wrote in a similar vein in the same year, regretting that Her Majesty's laws would no more be heard of among the Connaught people 'through the revival of the tyranny of the Macs and Os'.[13] However, it is important to note that what was involved

10 *Statutes and Ordinances and Acts of the Parliament of Ireland, King John to Henry V*, Dublin 1907, page 435.
11 *Statute Rolls of the Parliament of Ireland, First to the Twelfth Years of the Reign of King Edward the Fourth*, Dublin 1914, page 291.
12 Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, H J Todd, Editor, *Works of Edmund Spenser*, London 1869 Edition, page 552, accessed via Google Books.
13 Sir Richard Bingham to Sir Robert Cecil, 27 May 1596, *Calendar of State Papers Ireland*, 1592-96,

here was not opposition to Gaelic surnames as such, but to the practice of the heads of septs using their surnames as chiefly titles, for example, O Neill, Mac Carthy Mór, this being interpreted as a sign of rejection of English authority.

It was perhaps memory of the medieval legislation and the hostile comments of the Tudor period which gave rise to the belief that there existed English laws specifically prohibiting the use of Mac and O. This was to have an embarrassing outcome when in 1898 Daniel McAleese, MP for North Monaghan, introduced in the British House of Commons an Irish surnames bill with a clause providing for the repeal of all ancient statutes which supposedly forbade the use of O and Mac prefixes. The bill did not proceed when the Irish Attorney General John Atkinson reported that there was no statute or principle of common law 'to prevent a gentleman taking up the prefix O or Mac as frequently as he pleases and shedding it when he pleases'.[14] The late nineteenth century was a period of national revival, one accompanying trend being this desire to readopt O and Mac prefixes, although as will be shown below the practice was by no means general.

### Variants and Settlers

We should also take account of the surnames of successive waves of invaders and settlers which have become naturalised in this country over the centuries, for it is limiting to define Irish surnames as those of Gaelic origin only. Surnames of Norse origin are comparatively few in number, examples including Arthur and Harold. There is also a small number of surnames formed from Norse forenames adopted by the Irish, for example, Mac Amhlaoibh, anglicised McAuliffe, from Olaf. In contrast, surnames of Anglo-Norman origin are very numerous and many have become almost exclusively Irish, examples being Burke, Costello, Cusack, Dillon, Fitzgerald and so on. The plantations of the 16th and 17th centuries saw the introduction of many common English and Scottish surnames, such as Smith/Smyth, Brown(e), Murray, Wilson, Campbell, and so on. Smaller settlements, usually of refugees, have also left their mark in terms of surnames, for example, the Huguenot Boileau, La Touche and Le Fanu, and the German Palatine Bovenizer and Switzer.

It is vital for the genealogist to be aware of the possible variants of a surname, in order to avoid missing crucial entries during research. The first reason for variations in the spelling of Irish surnames is the fact that the bulk of them are of Gaelic origin, and their translation into English was not performed in a standardised manner. The process of anglicisation of surnames did not always proceed in a predictable or logical fashion, as is demonstrated in the case of the most common Irish surname, Ó Murchadha, for centuries now almost always appearing as Murphy. In the mid-seventeenth century more rational anglicisations such as Morrow, Morrogh and O'Murchoe were to be found with Murphy in County Wexford, but in time the latter form would eclipse the others.[15]

Throughout the period of Anglicisation there was a tendency for Gaelic surnames to lose their O or Mac prefixes, while from the late nineteenth century

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14 House of Commons Debates, 30 March 1898, *Hansard*, volume 55, columns 1,435-7, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1898/mar/30/irish-surnames-bill, accessed 24 November 2013.

15 See 'Index of Persons' under these names in Séamus Pender, Editor, *A Census of Ireland circa 1659*, Irish Manuscripts Commission, Dublin 2002 edition.

onwards the national revival led to significant but not general resumption of prefixes, as will be shown below. Thus in the case of surnames such as O'Connor and MacMahon, it is prudent to search indexes and records for the forms Connor and Mahon also. Then there are surnames which have appeared under a wide variety of spellings, such as Ahearn/Ahearne/Ahern, Cavanagh/Kavanagh, (O)Donoghoe/Donoghue/Donohoe, Malloy/Molloy/Mulloy, and so on. Furthermore, there are those Gaelic surnames which been both Anglicised and assimilated to English surnames of similar sound or meaning, for example, (Mac)Brehon/Judge, Cuneen/Rabbit, (Mac)Gowan/Smith. Of course, surnames of settler origin have also been subject to variation, examples being Allison/Ellison, Carr/Kerr, Cockburn/Coburn. The prudent approach therefore is to search first under the received form of a surname, then under relevant variants.

### Matheson's 1890 Survey

Over a century ago, the then Registrar General of Births, Marriages and Deaths, Sir Robert E Matheson, commenced his pioneering study of Irish surnames, the results of which he published in the early 1900s.[16] Table 1 based on Matheson's listing shows that the ten principal surnames in Ireland in 1890 were Murphy, Kelly, Sullivan, Walsh, Smith, O'Brien, Byrne, Ryan, Connor, O'Neill. It is notable that with the exception of Smith, these are all surnames of Gaelic origin. The most common surname, Murphy, is of course polygenetic, referring to several unrelated septs formerly centered in Wexford, Cork-Kerry, Roscommon and Armagh-Tyrone. It is notable also that it is the numerous Munster and particularly Cork component which propels Murphy into the top position. Sullivan on the other hand is an apparently monogenetic surname, with an unusually high 90% of its bearers concentrated in Munster. Byrne is another example of a highly localised surname, with some 80% of its bearers concentrated in Leinster.

## *Table 1: Ten Most Common Surnames in Ireland 1890*

| Rank | Surname | Estimated Population 1890 | % of Total Population | % by Province | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Lei | Mun | Uls | Con |
| 1 | Murphy | 62,600 | 1.29 | 34 | 44 | 14 | 8 |
| 2 | Kelly | 55,900 | 1.19 | 34 | 17 | 22 | 27 |
| 3 | Sullivan | 43,600 | 0.92 | 6 | 90 | 2 | 2 |
| 4 | Walsh | 41,700 | 0.89 | 25 | 42 | 6 | 27 |
| 5 | Smith | 33,700 | 0.71 | 31 | 8 | 55 | 6 |
| 6 | O'Brien | 33,400 | 0.71 | 21 | 58 | 11 | 10 |
| 7 | Byrne | 33,300 | 0.71 | 80 | 7 | 7 | 6 |
| 8 | Ryan | 32,000 | 0.68 | 25 | 66 | 2 | 7 |
| 9 | Connor | 31,200 | 0.66 | 26 | 37 | 16 | 21 |
| 10 | O'Neill | 29,100 | 0.62 | 31 | 27 | 35 | 7 |

16 Robert E Matheson, *Varieties and Synonymes of Surnames and Christian Names in Ireland*, Dublin 1901, and *Special Report on Surnames in Ireland*, Dublin 1909, both reprinted as *Surnames in Ireland*, Baltimore, Maryland, 1982.

Estimated population of Ireland 1890: 4.7 million.

Source: Matheson, *Special Report on Surnames in Ireland*.


**Telephone Directories Survey**

Using hardcopy and CD-ROM directories of telephone subscribers, the writer has been engaged in a survey of Irish surnames for some decades. Current online directories do not lend themselves to statistical analysis, indeed they are designed to facilitate only single searches for reasons of confidentiality and avoiding commercial abuse of information. It was decided therefore to fall back on available older material, specifically a CD-ROM version of the Irish telephone directory for 1997-98 (compiled 1997) and the hardcopy Northern Ireland telephone directory for 1993 (compiled 1992).[17] An effort in the early 1990's to obtain data on Northern Ireland surnames in electronic format was met with a response to the effect that these were an integral part of the United Kingdom telephone directory database and could not be separated therefrom, hence the reliance on the hardcopy telephone directory. The present report is based on this telephone directory-based surnames survey, which involves no breach of privacy or confidentiality in that specific individuals are not identified. Statistics relating to the frequency and distribution of the hundred most common surnames appear in the appendices to the present report, and we will now deal with some of the main features of the data.

Table 2 gives a listing of the ten most common surnames of Irish and Northern Irish telephone subscribers in the period 1992-97, with the tentatively estimated total population bearing each surname, and comparison with Matheson's 1890 ranking. It can be seen that there has been little significant change in relative ranking since the nineteenth century. Thus Murphy is still 1st and (O)Kelly still 2nd, and most of the other surnames have not altered their places significantly. Exceptions are (O)Connor, which is 4th today but 9th in Matheson, and Smith, 9th today and 5th in Matheson. The difference in the ranking of Smith is not really significant in terms of percentage of total population, but the lower ranking of (O)Connor by Matheson may be partly accounted for by his decision not to count the form Connors separately.

### *Table 2: Ten Most Common Surnames in Ireland 1992-97*

| Rank | 1890 Rank | Surname | Estimated Population | % of Total Pop |
|------|-----------|---------|----------------------|----------------|
| 1 | 1 | Murphy | 70,900 | 1.35 |
| 2 | 2 | (O)Kelly | 59,800 | 1.13 |
| 3 | 4 | Walsh(e) | 44,100 | 0.84 |
| 4 | 9 | (O)Connor | 43,000 | 0.81 |
| 5 | 3 | (O)Sullivan | 41,500 | 0.79 |
| 6 | 7 | (O)Byrne | 41,300 | 0.78 |

17 Telecom Éireann, *Irish Telephone Directory,* 1997/98, CD-ROM; British Telecom, *The Phone Book, Northern Ireland*, 1993.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | 6 | (O)Brien | 39,700 | 0.75 |
| 8 | 8 | Ryan | 39,200 | 0.74 |
| 9 | 5 | Smith/Smyth | 38,800 | 0.74 |
| 10 | 10 | (O)Neill | 35,000 | 0.66 |

Estimated mean population of Ireland 1992-97: 5.3 million (3.6 million Republic of Ireland, 1.7 million Northern Ireland).

Sources: Matheson, *Special Report on Surnames in Ireland*; Telecom Éireann, *Irish Telephone Directory*, 1997/98, CD-ROM; British Telecom, *The Phone Book, Northern Ireland*, 1993.

### Regional Distribution

As well as studying the distribution of surnames nationally, it is useful to examine distribution locally. Table 3 shows the ten most common surnames within each telephone area, with the approximate provincial or county coverage indicated in each case. Unfortunately telephone areas do not exactly match and indeed cross historical provincial and county boundaries, and of course Northern Ireland is governed by a different administrative system being part of the United Kingdom. It can be seen that while some surnames which predominate nationally can also be numerous locally, such as Murphy and Smith, others are numerous locally but are not at the top of the table nationally, for example, Whelan and Moore. Note also that surnames in Munster and Ulster tend to be more concentrated locally than those in other areas, for example, O'Sullivan and Wilson, with two-thirds and four-fifths concentrated in Munster and Northern Ireland respectively.

## *Table 3: Most Common Surnames by Telephone Area 1992-97*

*Rank, main surname form, estimated number of bearers and percentage of national total.*

**01 Greater Dublin**
1 Byrne 20,600 (50%), 2 Murphy 17,700 (25%), 3 Kelly 17,300 (29%), 4 O'Brien 11,500 (29%), 5 Walsh 11,500 (26%), 6 Doyle 11,000 (42%), 7 O'Connor 10,700 (25%), 8 O'Reilly 10,300 (35%), 9 Ryan 10,200 (26%), 10 Smith 9,300 (24%).

**04/05 Leinster/South Ulster**
1 Murphy 17,700 (25%), 2 Byrne 13,600 (33%), 3 Kelly 12,600 (21%), 4 Walsh 11,900 (27%), 5 Ryan 11,000 (28%), 6 O'Reilly 10,900 (37%), 7 Doyle 9,900 (38%), 8 Smith 9,700 (25%), 9 Whelan 7,600 (43%), 10 O'Brien 9,500 (24%).

**02/06 Munster**
1 O'Sullivan 27,800 (67%), 2 Murphy 22,700 (32%), 3 O'Connor 17,200 (40%), 4 McCarthy 16,800 (64%), 5 Ryan 14,500 (37%), 6 O'Brien 13,900 (35%), 7 Walsh 11,000 (25%), 8 O'Mahony 9,400 (69%), 9 O'Connell 9,300 (52%), 10 O'Donovan

8,900 (73%).

**07/09 Connacht/Donegal**
1 Kelly 10,800 (18%), 2 Gallagher 9,700 (48%), 3 Doherty 8,100 (34%), 4 Walsh 7,100 (16%), 5 McLaughlin 6,500 (30%), 6 Burke 6,200 (27%), 7 O'Donnell 5,300 (36%), 8 Boyle 4,400 (34%), 9 O'Connor 4,300 (10%), 10 Sweeney 4,000 (30%).

**Northern Ireland**
1 Smith 15,500 (40%), 2 Wilson 14,700 (79%), 3 Johnston 14,400 (74%), 4 Campbell 13,400 (70%), 5 Thompson 12,300 (78%), 6 Brown 12,300 (50%), 7 Kelly 11,400 (19%), 8 O'Neill 11,200 (32%), 9 Moore 10,600 (51%), 10 Stewart 10,300 (77%).

Sources: Telecom Éireann, *Irish Telephone Directory*, 1997/98, CD-ROM; British Telecom, *The Phone Book, Northern Ireland*, 1993.

### Usage of 'O' and 'Mac' Prefixes

Table 4 illustrates another characteristic of surnames of Gaelic origin, the use of the 'O' and 'Mac' prefixes. 'O' surnames tend to be found in the south of the country and 'Mac' surnames in the north, but there are exceptions, eg, MacCarthy in Munster and O'Neill in Ulster. It can be seen as well that the 'O' surnames display higher frequencies than the 'Mac' ones. Thus there are 6 'O' surnames in the top ten, while the 6 most numerous 'Mac' surnames range from 12th to 51st in position. Another interesting feature is the degree to which the 'O' and 'Mac' prefixes have been restored since the revival of interest in things Gaelic in the late nineteenth century. There has been a dramatic change in the case of O'Sullivan, with 86% not using the prefix in 1890 and 89% using it in the 1990s, while O'Brien and O'Neill register substantial increases. In contrast, over 90% of Kellys and Byrnes still do not use the prefix, MacCarthys and MacLaughlins have increased usage somewhat, Maguires and Magraths are a consistent 100% and MacMahons and MacKennas are relatively static.

### *Table 4: Use of 'O' and 'Mac' Prefixes in Ireland 1992-97 and 1890*

| Rank | Surname | % 1992-97 | | % 1890 | |
|------|---------|--------|------|--------|------|
| | | **Prefix** | **None** | **Prefix** | **None** |
| 2 | (O)Kelly | 3 | 97 | 1 | 99 |
| 4 | (O)Connor | 89 | 11 | 32 | 68 |
| 5 | (O)Sullivan | 89 | 11 | 14 | 86 |
| 6 | (O)Byrne | 5 | 95 | 1 | 99 |
| 7 | (O)Brien | 98 | 2 | 67 | 33 |
| 10 | (O)Neill | 92 | 8 | 63 | 37 |
| 12 | (Mc)Carthy | 97 | 3 | 85 | 15 |
| 19 | (Mc)Laughlin | 92 | 8 | 87 | 13 |
| 35 | (Mc)Mahon | 71 | 29 | 74 | 26 |

| 45 | Maguire/McGuire | 100 | 0 | 100 | 0 |
| 48 | Magrath/McGrath | 100 | 0 | 100 | 0 |
| 51 | (Mc)Cormack | 98 | 2 | 94 | 6 |

Sources: Matheson, *Special Report on Surnames in Ireland*; Telecom Éireann, *Irish Telephone Directory*, 1997/98, CD-ROM; British Telecom, *The Phone Book, Northern Ireland*, 1993.

### Gaelic Forms of Surnames

Some individuals have tended to use the Gaelic form of their surnames, particularly since the period of the national cultural revival in the late nineteenth century. Indeed in national schools after independence every child's name was translated into Irish, and the present writer recalls that he was known in school in the 1960s as Seán 'Bán' Ó Murchú, being distinguished by reference to his lighter coloured hair from another Sean Murphy in the class who was known as Seán 'Dubh' Ó Murchú on account of his darker hair colour. Of course telephone directory analysis is a good way to measure the percentage of those whose commitment to the use of the language extends to consistent use of the Gaelic form of their names. While the numbers of Gaelic surnames found in the directories are of interest, they are so statistically low (less than 1%) that it was not considered necessary to include them in the main totals of surnames in English on which the greater part of the present survey is based.

Nevertheless, let us consider some of the more commonly encountered surnames in order to illustrate the pattern of Gaelic usage. It can be seen that occurrence of the Gaelic forms of surnames is most common in the greater Dublin area and along the western seaboard, where use of the language is strongest. The even lower occurrence of Gaelic forms of surnames in the Northern Ireland telephone directory may reflect political sensitivities surrounding national identity in that state, but it would be fair to say that the Peace Process has resulted in greater efforts to respect the culture of the North's Gaelic speakers (balanced by recognition of the Ulster Scots dialect). It should be noted that in Table 5 below it has been necessary sometimes to correct garbled versions of the Gaelic surnames in the directories, eg, by removing apostrophes after the 'Ó' prefix.

## *Table 5: Use of Gaelic Forms of Surnames in Ireland 1992-97*

| Surname, Gaelic/English | Total telephone entries | Main telephone area concentrations |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Ó Murchú/Murphy | 56 | 01 36%, 02/06 48% |
| Ó Ceallaigh/(O)Kelly | 60 | 01 48%, 07/09 27% |
| Breathnach/Walsh | 79 | 01 48%, 07/09 28% |
| Ó Conchubhair/(O)Connor | 21 | 01 38%, 02/06 33% |
| Ó Súilleabháin/(O)Sullivan | 58 | 01 29%, 02/06 54% |
| Ó Broin/(O)Byrne | 55 | 01 73% |
| Ó Briain/(O)Brien | 41 | 01 68%, 02/06 12% |

Sources: Telecom Éireann, *Irish Telephone Directory*, 1997/98, CD-ROM; British Telecom, *The Phone Book, Northern Ireland*, 1993.

### Anglo-Norman Surnames

Given the historical prominence of families bearing Anglo-Norman surnames, these are perhaps not of such a high frequency as might be expected. It may be a surprise to find that, as shown in Table 6, there are only five pure Anglo-Norman surnames in the top hundred, the highest Burke and Fitzgerald being at 17 and 43 respectively, with a well known name such as Butler outside the top 100. It would be fair to conclude that the impact of the Anglo-Normans in Ireland has been disproportionate to their numbers. There are surnames such as Lynch and Martin which can be of Anglo-Norman origin, but most bearers will be found to be of different stock, in these two cases respectively Gaelic and English. While Burke is quite evenly distributed in all areas outside north-east Ulster, one half of the Fitzgeralds are concentrated in Munster.

## *Table 6: Most Common Anglo-Norman Surnames in Ireland 1992-97*

| Rank | Surname | Estimated Population | % of Total Pop |
|------|---------|---------------------|----------------|
| 17 | Burke | 22,900 | 0.44 |
| 43 | Fitzgerald | 15,500 | 0.29 |
| 53 | Power | 13,600 | 0.26 |
| 72 | Barry | 11,400 | 0.22 |
| 89 | Roche | 9,600 | 0.18 |

Sources: Telecom Éireann, *Irish Telephone Directory*, 1997/98, CD-ROM; British Telecom, *The Phone Book, Northern Ireland*, 1993.

### British Surnames in Ireland

As might be anticipated, the bulk of surnames in Ireland of British origin are concentrated in Ulster and Leinster, where of course most settlement from the neighbouring island has occurred. Where English surnames are found in large numbers outside north-east Ulster and Leinster, it will usually be the case that these are Anglicisations of Gaelic surnames, for example, Clark (Ó Cléirigh), Boyle (Ó Baoighill) and Collins (Ó Coileáin). There is also much scope for confusion between Irish and Scottish surnames of Gaelic origin, for example, O'Neill and McNeill or McCarthy and McCartney. While Smith can be an Anglicisation of the Gaelic Mac Gabhann (McGowan, 'son of the smith'), most Smiths are actually of British stock and concentrated in Ulster and Leinster. Bearing in mind that not all bearers will be of non-Irish stock, Table 7 lists the principal British surnames in Ireland.

## *Table 7: Most Common British Surnames in Ireland 1992-97*

| Rank | Surname | Estimated Population | % of Total Pop |
|------|---------|---------------------|----------------|
| 9 | Smith | 38,800 | 0.74 |
| 14 | Brown | 24,600 | 0.47 |
| 15 | Murray | 24,300 | 0.46 |
| 22 | Moore | 20,800 | 0.39 |
| 24 | Johnston | 19,500 | 0.37 |
| 25 | Campbell | 19,200 | 0.36 |
| 27 | Clarke | 19,000 | 0.36 |
| 28 | Wilson | 18,500 | 0.35 |
| 29 | Dunne | 18,400 | 0.35 |
| 32 | Martin | 17,800 | 0.34 |

Sources: Telecom Éireann, *Irish Telephone Directory*, 1997/98, CD-ROM; British Telecom, *The Phone Book, Northern Ireland*, 1993.

**Statistical Note**

For the purposes of this study it was first of all necessary to estimate a mean total population of Ireland for the period 1992-97. The census totals for the Republic of Ireland for 1991 and 2001 were 3.5 million and 3.9 million respectively, while the census totals for Northern Ireland for 1991 and 2001 were 1.6 million and 1.7 million respectively.[18] From these figures a mean population total for all Ireland in the period 1992-97 was estimated at 5.3 million, comprising 3.6 million for the Republic of Ireland and 1.7 million for Northern Ireland. Complete precision was not possible given that the telephone directory data for the Republic of Ireland was dated 1997 and that for Northern Ireland was dated 1992. There was then a need to derive estimated bearers of surnames from totals of entries in telephone directories, using census data for the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, the results of this process being summarised in the following table.

It should be emphasised that the final multipliers cannot be claimed to be absolutely statistically precise, but do provide a means of giving reasonable estimated totals of the bearers of the one hundred most common surnames listed in Appendix 1. There is a percentage of the total population figure for each surname, followed by percentage distribution throughout the various telephone directory areas. Finally, the average deviation is given as a basic statistical measure which shows whether a surname is widely distributed and likely to be polygenetic (lower figure), or more concentrated and possibly monogenetic or of settler origin (higher figure). Thus the average deviations for Murphy and Kelly, found in most areas of Ireland, are 8.8 and 4, while those for O'Sullivan and Wilson, predominantly located in Munster and Ulster respectively, are 18.8 and 23.6.

18 Central Statistics Office (Republic of Ireland), http://www.cso.ie/; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, http://www.nisra.gov.uk/.

## *Table 8: Telephone Directory Areas Estimated Totals and Multipliers*

| Telephone areas | 01 | 04/05 | 02/06 | 07/09 | NI | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Population (millions) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0.6 | 1.7 | 5.3 |
| Households | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.6 | 1.7 |
| Directory entries | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.1 | 0.3 | 1 |
| % households in directories | 54 | 57 | 51 | 57 | 53 | 54 |
| Multipliers for converting directory entries to bearers of surname | 5.79 | 5.49 | 6.13 | 5.44 | 5.44 | 5.64 |

Sources: Telecom Éireann, *Irish Telephone Directory*, 1997/98, CD-ROM; 'Market Profile', *Golden Pages*, 1993/94, page 1,405; British Telecom, *The Phone Book, Northern Ireland*, 1993; census population figures from CSO and NISRA.

# *Irish Telephone Areas 1992-97 and Approximate Correlation with Counties*

## *Appendix 1: One Hundred Most Common Surnames in Ireland 1992-97*

| Rank | Surname (with % variants) | Estimated bearers | % total population | 01 | % 04/05 | by 02/06 | Area 07/09 | NI | Avge Dev |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Murphy | 70,900 | 1.35 | 25 | 25 | 32 | 7 | 11 | 8.8 |
| 2 | Kelly 97, O'Kelly 3 | 59,800 | 1.13 | 29 | 21 | 13 | 18 | 19 | 4.0 |
| 3 | Walsh 94, Walshe 6 | 44,100 | 0.84 | 26 | 27 | 25 | 16 | 6 | 7.2 |
| 4 | O'Connor 89, Connor 9, Connors 2 | 43,000 | 0.81 | 25 | 17 | 40 | 10 | 8 | 10.0 |
| 5 | O'Sullivan 89, Sullivan 11 | 41,500 | 0.79 | 17 | 11 | 67 | 3 | 2 | 18.8 |
| 6 | Byrne 95, O'Byrne 5 | 41,300 | 0.78 | 50 | 33 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 17.2 |
| 7 | O'Brien 98, Brien 2 | 39,700 | 0.75 | 29 | 24 | 35 | 8 | 4 | 11.2 |
| 8 | Ryan | 39,200 | 0.74 | 26 | 28 | 37 | 7 | 2 | 12.4 |
| 9 | Smith 52, Smyth 48 | 38,800 | 0.74 | 24 | 25 | 5 | 6 | 40 | 11.6 |
| 10 | O'Neill 92, Neill 8 | 35,000 | 0.66 | 24 | 21 | 18 | 5 | 32 | 6.8 |
| 11 | O'Reilly 61, Reilly 39 | 29,400 | 0.56 | 35 | 37 | 8 | 10 | 10 | 12.8 |
| 12 | M(a)cCarthy 97, Carthy 3 | 26,200 | 0.50 | 21 | 11 | 64 | 3 | 1 | 18.0 |
| 13 | Doyle | 26,100 | 0.50 | 42 | 38 | 8 | 5 | 7 | 16.0 |
| 14 | Brown 56, Browne 44 | 24,600 | 0.47 | 17 | 11 | 14 | 8 | 50 | 12.0 |
| 15 | Murray | 24,300 | 0.46 | 29 | 19 | 11 | 13 | 28 | 6.8 |
| 16 | Doherty 85, O'Doherty 12, Dougherty 3 | 23,900 | 0.45 | 13 | 8 | 8 | 34 | 37 | 12.4 |
| 17 | Burke 80, Bourke 20 | 22,900 | 0.44 | 23 | 21 | 22 | 27 | 7 | 5.2 |
| 18 | Lynch | 22,700 | 0.43 | 26 | 23 | 31 | 9 | 11 | 8.0 |
| 19 | M(a)cLaughlin 51, M(a)cLoughlin 41, Loughlin 6, Laughlin 2 | 21,600 | 0.41 | 16 | 10 | 5 | 30 | 39 | 11.6 |
| 20 | Quinn 99, Quin 1 | 21,500 | 0.41 | 22 | 15 | 11 | 15 | 37 | 7.6 |
| 21 | Kennedy | 21,200 | 0.40 | 24 | 21 | 18 | 10 | 27 | 4.8 |
| 22 | Moore | 20,800 | 0.39 | 20 | 15 | 8 | 6 | 51 | 12.4 |
| 23 | Gallagher | 20,100 | 0.38 | 16 | 8 | 6 | 48 | 22 | 12.0 |
| 24 | Johnston 86, Johnson 12, Johnstone 2 | 19,500 | 0.37 | 10 | 8 | 4 | 4 | 74 | 21.6 |
| 25 | Campbell | 19,200 | 0.36 | 12 | 7 | 2 | 9 | 70 | 20.0 |
| 26 | Brennan | 19,100 | 0.36 | 30 | 33 | 10 | 17 | 10 | 9.2 |
| 27 | Clarke 95, Clark 5 | 19,000 | 0.36 | 23 | 23 | 5 | 11 | 38 | 9.6 |
| 28 | Wilson | 18,500 | 0.35 | 8 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 79 | 23.6 |
| 29 | Dunne 92, Dunn 8 | 18,400 | 0.35 | 40 | 39 | 7 | 5 | 9 | 9.0 |
| 30 | Daly 99, O'Daly 1 | 18,200 | 0.35 | 27 | 21 | 35 | 9 | 8 | 9.2 |
| 31 | O'Connell 88, Connell 12 | 18,000 | 0.34 | 21 | 15 | 52 | 9 | 3 | 13.2 |
| 32 | Martin | 17,800 | 0.34 | 20 | 18 | 7 | 8 | 47 | 10.8 |
| 33 | Whelan 64, Phelan 36 | 17,700 | 0.33 | 38 | 43 | 12 | 4 | 3 | 16.4 |
| 34 | Flynn 84, O'Flynn 16 | 17,400 | 0.33 | 25 | 25 | 27 | 17 | 6 | 6.8 |
| 35 | M(a)cMahon 71, Mahon 29 | 17,300 | 0.33 | 27 | 22 | 25 | 9 | 17 | 5.6 |
| 36 | Farrell 86, O'Farrell 14 | 17,100 | 0.32 | 39 | 34 | 8 | 11 | 8 | 13.2 |
| 37 | Carroll 85, O'Carroll 15 | 17,000 | 0.32 | 32 | 31 | 25 | 8 | 4 | 11.2 |
| 38 | Collins | 16,300 | 0.31 | 21 | 11 | 44 | 10 | 14 | 10.0 |
| 39 | Nolan 99, O'Nolan 1 | 16,300 | 0.31 | 39 | 37 | 14 | 7 | 3 | 14.4 |
| 40 | Connolly | 16,200 | 0.31 | 23 | 24 | 13 | 20 | 20 | 2.8 |
| 41 | O'Donoghue 53, Donohoe 21, Donoghue 13, Donohue 8, O'Donohoe 3, O'Donohue 2 | 15,900 | 0.30 | 26 | 23 | 38 | 11 | 2 | 10.8 |
| 42 | Thompson 97, Thomson 3 | 15,800 | 0.30 | 8 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 78 | 23.2 |
| 43 | Fitzgerald | 15,500 | 0.29 | 23 | 20 | 49 | 5 | 3 | 12.8 |
| 44 | Hughes | 15,400 | 0.29 | 23 | 18 | 4 | 11 | 44 | 10.8 |
| 45 | Maguire 85, M(a)cGuire 15 | 15,400 | 0.29 | 28 | 21 | 7 | 11 | 33 | 8.8 |

| Rank | Surname (with % variants) | Estimated bearers | % total population | 01 | % 04/05 | by 02/06 | Area 07/09 | NI | Avge Dev |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 46 | O'Donnell 98, Donnell 2 (est) | 14,600 | 0.28 | 17 | 13 | 21 | 36 | 13 | 6.8 |
| 47 | White 81, Whyte 19 | 14,500 | 0.28 | 23 | 20 | 18 | 8 | 31 | 5.6 |
| 48 | M(a)cGrath 99, Magrath 1 | 14,500 | 0.28 | 23 | 24 | 22 | 11 | 20 | 3.6 |
| 49 | Duffy 99, O'Duffy 1 | 14,300 | 0.27 | 27 | 28 | 3 | 24 | 18 | 7.6 |
| 50 | Kavanagh 93, Cavanagh 7 | 14,100 | 0.27 | 43 | 34 | 9 | 9 | 5 | 14.8 |
| 51 | M(a)cCormack 64, M(a)cCormick 34, Cormack 2 | 13,900 | 0.26 | 21 | 24 | 8 | 12 | 35 | 8.0 |
| 52 | O'Mahony 75, Mahony 14, O'Mahoney 7, Mahoney 4 | 13,700 | 0.26 | 15 | 12 | 69 | 3 | 1 | 19.6 |
| 53 | Power | 13,600 | 0.26 | 21 | 52 | 21 | 3 | 3 | 13.6 |
| 54 | O'Callaghan 70, Callaghan 30 | 13,600 | 0.26 | 20 | 13 | 47 | 11 | 9 | 10.8 |
| 55 | Stewart 91, Stuart 9 | 13,400 | 0.25 | 10 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 77 | 22.8 |
| 56 | Sweeney 74, M(a)cSweeney 26 | 13,200 | 0.25 | 21 | 10 | 31 | 30 | 8 | 8.8 |
| 57 | Boyle 83, O'Boyle 17 | 13,100 | 0.25 | 16 | 11 | 6 | 34 | 33 | 10.8 |
| 58 | O'Shea 98, Shea 2 | 13,000 | 0.25 | 18 | 17 | 61 | 3 | 1 | 16.4 |
| 59 | Brady | 12,900 | 0.25 | 38 | 37 | 3 | 9 | 13 | 14.0 |
| 60 | Fitzpatrick 96, Patrick 4 | 12,700 | 0.24 | 30 | 31 | 13 | 6 | 20 | 8.4 |
| 61 | Healy | 12,600 | 0.24 | 24 | 15 | 41 | 17 | 3 | 10.0 |
| 62 | Donnelly | 12,400 | 0.23 | 23 | 15 | 6 | 6 | 50 | 13.2 |
| 63 | O'Donovan 76, Donovan 24 | 12,200 | 0.23 | 15 | 8 | 73 | 3 | 1 | 21.2 |
| 64 | O'Leary 99, Leary 1 | 12,100 | 0.23 | 20 | 15 | 61 | 3 | 1 | 16.4 |
| 65 | M(a)cKenna 93, Kenna 7 | 12,100 | 0.23 | 22 | 31 | 8 | 4 | 35 | 11.2 |
| 66 | Hayes | 12,100 | 0.23 | 20 | 19 | 46 | 3 | 12 | 10.4 |
| 67 | Robinson | 12,000 | 0.23 | 12 | 6 | 2 | 5 | 75 | 22.0 |
| 68 | Graham | 12,000 | 0.23 | 10 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 77 | 22.8 |
| 69 | Kenny | 11,800 | 0.22 | 36 | 26 | 12 | 20 | 6 | 8.8 |
| 70 | Keane 99, O'Keane 1 | 11,800 | 0.22 | 24 | 14 | 35 | 26 | 1 | 10.0 |
| 71 | Cunningham | 11,500 | 0.22 | 18 | 15 | 12 | 19 | 36 | 6.4 |
| 72 | Barry | 11,400 | 0.22 | 21 | 17 | 53 | 4 | 5 | 13.6 |
| 73 | Moran | 11,300 | 0.21 | 29 | 20 | 11 | 34 | 6 | 9.2 |
| 74 | Kane 59, O'Kane 41 | 11,300 | 0.21 | 21 | 11 | 2 | 6 | 60 | 16.4 |
| 75 | Casey | 11,200 | 0.21 | 21 | 22 | 37 | 11 | 9 | 8.0 |
| 76 | M(a)cDonnell 97, Donnell 3 (est) | 10,800 | 0.21 | 35 | 20 | 11 | 17 | 17 | 6.0 |
| 77 | Hamilton | 10,600 | 0.20 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 80 | 24.0 |
| 78 | Keogh 65, Kehoe 31, McKeogh 4 | 10,500 | 0.20 | 42 | 41 | 11 | 4 | 2 | 17.2 |
| 79 | Foley | 10,500 | 0.20 | 22 | 26 | 41 | 8 | 3 | 11.6 |
| 80 | Buckley | 10,400 | 0.20 | 18 | 11 | 63 | 4 | 4 | 17.2 |
| 81 | O'Keeffe 95, O'Keefe 5 | 10,400 | 0.20 | 20 | 22 | 54 | 2 | 2 | 14.4 |
| 82 | Ward | 10,100 | 0.19 | 28 | 19 | 7 | 23 | 23 | 5.6 |
| 83 | M(a)cDonald 95, Donald 5 | 10,000 | 0.19 | 25 | 28 | 3 | 4 | 40 | 13.2 |
| 84 | Mullan 46, Mullen 41, Mullin 12, O'Mullan 1 | 10,000 | 0.19 | 18 | 13 | 3 | 13 | 53 | 13.2 |
| 85 | Reid 96, Read 2, Reed 2 | 10,000 | 0.19 | 22 | 10 | 3 | 4 | 61 | 17.2 |
| 86 | M(a)cCann | 9,900 | 0.19 | 21 | 10 | 2 | 7 | 60 | 16.4 |
| 87 | Curran | 9,900 | 0.19 | 21 | 22 | 12 | 16 | 29 | 4.8 |
| 88 | Scott | 9,600 | 0.18 | 11 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 73 | 21.2 |
| 89 | Roche | 9,600 | 0.18 | 26 | 34 | 33 | 6 | 1 | 13.2 |
| 90 | Maher | 9,500 | 0.18 | 35 | 44 | 15 | 5 | 1 | 15.6 |
| 91 | Griffin 98, Griffen 2 | 9,500 | 0.18 | 21 | 13 | 47 | 13 | 6 | 11.2 |
| 92 | Bell | 9,500 | 0.18 | 9 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 81 | 24.4 |
| 93 | Sheehan 85, Sheahan 15 | 9,500 | 0.18 | 17 | 12 | 68 | 2 | 1 | 19.2 |
| 94 | O'Dwyer 64, Dwyer 36 | 9,500 | 0.18 | 26 | 32 | 35 | 6 | 1 | 13.2 |
| 95 | Moloney 73, Maloney 23, Molony 4 | 9,400 | 0.18 | 23 | 17 | 45 | 14 | 1 | 11.2 |

| Rank | Surname (with % variants) | Estimated bearers | % total population | 01 | % 04/05 | by 02/06 | Area 07/09 | NI | Avge Dev |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 96 | Magee 66, M(a)cGee 34 | 9,300 | 0.18 | 14 | 13 | 3 | 16 | 54 | 13.6 |
| 97 | Higgins 96, O'Higgins 4 | 9,300 | 0.18 | 24 | 14 | 16 | 26 | 20 | 4.0 |
| 98 | M(a)cKeown 74, M(a)cKeon 21, Keown 5 | 9,200 | 0.18 | 15 | 13 | 3 | 7 | 62 | 16.8 |
| 99 | Cullen | 9,200 | 0.18 | 41 | 33 | 4 | 10 | 12 | 13.6 |
| 100 | Lyons | 9,200 | 0.17 | 25 | 15 | 27 | 19 | 14 | 4.8 |

Total estimated bearers of top 100 surnames 1,767,900, or 33% of population of 5.3 million.

Sources: *Irish Telephone Directory 1997/98*, CD-ROM, and *Phone Book, Northern Ireland, 1993*

# Appendix 2: Surnames in Alphabetical Order with Rank

*Refers to Appendix 1; O and Mac surnames indexed under first letter after prefix*

Barry 72
Bell 92
(O)Boyle 57
Brady 59
Brennan 26
(O)Brien 7
Brown(e) 14
Buckley 80
Burke/Bourke 17
(O)Byrne 6
(O)Callaghan 54
Campbell 25
(Mc)Cann 86
Carroll 37
(Mc)Carthy 12
Casey 75
Cavanagh – see Kavanagh
Clark(e) 27
Collins 38
(O)Connell 31
Connolly 40
(O)Connor 4
(Mc)Cormack/Cormick 51
Cullen 99
Cunningham 71
Curran 87
Daly 30
(O)Doherty 16
(Mc)Donald 83
(Mc)Donnell 76
(O)Donnell 46
Donnelly 62
(O)Donoghue/Donohoe 41
(O)Donovan 63

Doyle 13
Duffy 49
Dunn(e) 29
(O)Dwyer 94
(O)Farrell 36
Fitzgerald 43
Fitzpatrick 60
(O)Flynn 34
Foley 79
Gallagher 23
Magee/McGee 96
Graham 68
(Mc)Grath 48
Griffin 91
Maguire/McGuire 45
Hamilton 77
Hayes 66
Healy 61
Higgins 97
Hughes 44
Johns(t)on 24
(O)Kane 74
Kavanagh/Cavanagh 50
Keane 70
(O)Kee(f)fe 81
(O)Kelly 2
(Mc)Kenna 65
Kennedy 21
Kenny 69
Keogh/Kehoe 78
(Mc)Keown/Keon 98
(Mc)Laughlin/Loughlin 19
(O)Leary 64
Lynch 18

Lyons 100
Maher 90
(Mc)Mahon 35
(O)Mahony/Mahoney 52
Martin 32
Moloney/Maloney 95
Moore 22
Moran 73
Mullan/Mullen 84
Murphy 1
Murray 15
(O)Neill 10
Nolan 39
Phelan – see Whelan
Power 53
Quinn 20
Reid/Read 85
(O)Reilly 11
Robinson 67
Roche 89
Ryan 8
Scott 88
(O)Shea 58
Sheehan/Sheahan 93
Smith/Smyth 9
Stewart/Stuart 55
(O)Sullivan 5
(Mc)Sweeney 56
Thom(p)son 42
Walsh(e) 3
Ward 82
Whelan/Phelan 33
White/Whyte 47
Wilson 28